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The Ministry of the Holy Ghost

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'Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the LORD of hosts.'

ZECHARIAH.

'And grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.'

ST. PAUL.

The Ministry of the Holy Ghost

By the Rev. John Morgan,
Viewforth Free Church, *Edinburgh*

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TO MY CONGREGATION

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PREFACE

IT is to be hoped the title of this volume may not be found misleading. For the subject is very great, and this is only an attempt to touch its utmost fringe. Yet it is a humble, but honest effort, to call attention to, and emphasise, one of the most important factors in the whole realm of Christian teaching. The chapters of the book present some practical and prominent aspects of the Power and Work and Service of the Holy Ghost. And, while separate and distinct, they have, at the same time, a definite unity, and continuity, and plan. It is as if you were trying to explore some vast Alpine mountain range, and were compelled to linger over, and measure, and master, and reach, all the mighty peaks as you went along. Each of them would claim an interest and place of its own, while also forming a link in the great mountain-chain as a whole. And so, these great Scripture passages under review, while unfolding distinct and separate features of the Spirit's work, link themselves to one another, and, in their connection, manifest the unspeakable greatness and majesty of this ministry of the Holy Ghost, in the human heart, and in the Church, and in the world.

The trend of much modern preaching is in the direction of an ethical revival. And indeed, it is sorely, sadly needed. But how is it to be attained? It seems to me that the evangelical revival must, of very necessity, underlie the ethical—giving it true character, and providing for it firm foundation force and vital energy. For, after all, the Gospel is *the* 'power that makes for righteousness.' What we very greatly need in this time is a deepened and deepening sense of sin, and an intensified conviction that human nature is a moral wreck and ruin. We must have the courage to call men by their true name—sinners. And so, in order to bring sinners to Christ, we have first to bring Him to them, in the character of One who can forgive their sins, and heal their diseases, and redeem their lives from destruction. At the same time we are called reverently to stand aside, and make room for the Almighty Holy Ghost, while He applies this redemption-work to the sinner—so working within him the mighty moral miracle of grace, that his manhood shall be crowned, and his mouth filled with good, and his youth renewed like the eagle's.

It is with great hesitation and reluctance I have taken it upon me to issue this volume. Many generous friends have urged me to it, and suggested encouraging considerations. There is nothing novel, or even new, in the book. Its teaching is rather old, and severe, and conservative. But there lies at the heart of it all a profound conviction that the

Church's greatest need to-day, is a new investiture of Divine Life and Spiritual Power. The Holy Ghost deserves well of every one of us. He should be acknowledged and honoured. If we learn to wait on God, in the spirit of the first disciples, for the baptism of holy fire, we may confidently expect a speedy return of the best days Scotland has ever known—'when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.'

I desire to acknowledge my obligation to my old and esteemed friend, Dr. Robertson Nicoll, who has favoured me with valued counsel and suggestion, and has kindly read these sheets while passing through the press.

J. M.

EDINBURGH, *October* 1897.

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I

THE IRON DID SWIM

'And the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now, the place where we dwell with Thee is too strait for us. Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan, and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us a place there, where we may dwell. And he answered, Go ye. And one said, Be content, I pray thee, and go with thy servants. And he answered, I will go. So he went with them. And when they came to Jordan, they cut down wood. But as one was felling a beam, the axe-head fell into the water: and he cried, and said, Alas, master! for it was borrowed. And the man of God said, Where fell it? And he shewed him the place. And he cut down a stick, and cast it in thither; and the iron did swim. Therefore said he, Take it up to thee. And he put out his hand, and took it.'—2 KINGS vi. 1-7.

I SHALL not now discuss or call in question the verity of this extraordinary incident. Let us accept and take for granted, meanwhile, that we have before us a simple historical fact. My present purpose is to make use of it as a kind of spiritual formula by which to attempt the definition, and measurement, and calculation of the facts and issues and vast and wonderful possibilities, that are identified with the kingdom of God and the cause of Christ on the earth. My desire is to make some account and acknowledgment of that mighty, miraculous, supernatural, Divine force that is taking hold of the hearts and lives of sinful men, and there working a wonder so great and manifest as to be called 'a new creation in

Christ Jesus.' It may bring spiritual profit to our own souls, and inspire and encourage us in our work for God and humanity, if we can more fully and adequately realise that we have among us, and at our disposal here and now, the very power and energy that is to accomplish the world's conversion, and achieve the ultimate and universal triumph of our common Christianity.

I. We must make an ADMISSION—the iron HAD SUNK. Man is a fallen creature. He has sunk to low depths of degradation. Human nature is veritable ruin. True, there are still many traces of the original grandeur and magnificence. As in some old ruined palace or abbey you may be able to mark and admire the outline still left of a vanished greatness and glory; so in man, sunk and fallen as he is, you are compelled to acknowledge the sublime and beautiful traces of the Divine handiwork. Even after all the havoc sin has wrought, they seem to be indelible and indestructible. Yet all that only intensifies our conviction of the reality and the depth of human degeneracy and decrepitude and decay. 'How are the mighty fallen!'

There is great need to emphasise the doctrine of the Fall in these last days. It is not popular, nor is it at all welcome. By many, of whom we might have expected better things, it is only half understood or accepted. Some imagine we slander human nature when we try to delineate and prove its radical badness. It wounds their pride. It undermines their fanciful and false theory of human progression and evolution, which professes to eventually accomplish the perfection of both the individual and the race.

Scientific men have already been able to ascertain the main facts of the new doctrine of what is called *Heredity*, and have gone the length of an endeavour to fix and formulate the laws that regulate its action. The working of this principle, on its evil side, is positively awful; and is fitted to make the boldest man among us tremble. Yet here 'the man of science gives the devout religious thinker an analogy that becomes instructive in its application to spiritual things.' The chartered curse and the terrible entail of disease and predisposition to wrong-doing and to suffering—with all the dreadful results that flow from them—is handed on a dread legacy to the generations following.

This tainted life can only be accounted for and clearly explained when we trace it back to Eden. Men of science may largely be in revolt against the teachings of Revelation in reference both to sin and grace; and yet it is very striking and strange that they believe in original sin in a still harder and harsher and more sweeping way than is to be found in the old theologies. The old Confessional doctrine of human depravity has somewhat gone out of fashion. It needs to be sorrowfully yet frankly admitted. Never was there more serious call than now for the clear and emphatic enunciation of the teaching, both of nature and grace, science and Revelation, as to man's first disobedience and its dismal consequences.

And yet it is just here that the great practical difficulty meets us. Men in multitudes are in painful ignorance as to the facts of the case. You put on your shutters and lock your doors, and shut as best you can the world's sin and misery outside. You are

subjects of the restraining grace of God. And the love of Christ may constrain you as the controlling and regulating power of your life. You live in quiet and comfort and charity with all men. The awful surging, seething, squirming mass of human sin and wretchedness is by you largely unseen and unknown. It does not trouble or haunt or terrify you. At the very worst you are inclined to regard it as greatly exaggerated, and mostly imaginary. It must in some new and stern and severe outcry be brought home to both the conscience and heart of the Church. You admire the heroic attitude of that great Christian patriot Nehemiah, when he took that midnight ride through the ruins of Jerusalem, with its walls broken down and its gates burnt with fire. You are thrilled with keen and sympathetic emotion as you contemplate Ezekiel in the vision—'set down in the valley full of bones, and caused to pass by them round about; and behold,' he sorrowfully says, 'there were very many in the open valley; and lo! they were very dry.' You can well appreciate the boldness of Peter and John at the Beautiful Gate. A mass of misery confronts them, and challenges their apostolic mission and function. It comes between them and their prayers. That is the same awful problem we are face to face with in a thousand hideous forms still. When our blessed Lord beheld the city—doomed Jerusalem—'He wept over it.' Oh that the Church of Christ were awakened, and aroused, and had her eyes opened, to see and understand and comprehend the dread proportions of this mighty problem! 'They have healed the hurt of the daughter of my people slightly, saying, Peace, peace, when there is no peace.' 'Oh that my head were waters and mine eyes a

fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!'

But II. Over against this admission we must make an ASSERTION—the iron did swim.

1. There once lived on earth in human form a great and good Being, whose character and conduct were such as to render it impossible that He should be classified with sinful, fallen men. As these features of His character and life are portrayed and reflected in the Gospels, they give forth the impression of one who stands all alone and by himself, in solitary grandeur and sinless perfection. True, this view of the Person of Christ is not that which we realise all at once. It grows upon us. It is borne in upon us after years, it may be, of loving obedience, loyal service, and self-forgetting devotion. It is frequently an illustration of the principle according to which things are hid from the wise and prudent and are revealed unto babes. It is the fruit of holy fellowship, rather than of abstract attainment and laboured discovery. We come gradually and almost unconsciously to appreciate the overpowering purity and sustained goodness of that life, when we are compelled to contrast it with our own. It shapes for itself a holy beauty and consummate loveliness in childhood and youth, a graceful dignity and quiet reserve of strength, and calm assertion of holy purpose, in the home and the temple and the workshop. And when at length He came into the arena of public service, and personal suffering, how absolutely complete is the harmony and the unity of that great lone life! Hard and severe conditions and terribly cruel circumstances only served to enhance the unsullied

splendour of all He *was*, and *said*, and *did*, and *suffered*. You may be permitted to hesitate as to your estimate of the miracles He wrought, but assuredly there can be no question as to the miracle He *was*. The greatest of all Christ's miracles was Christ Himself—the man Christ Jesus. 'Without controversy, great is the mystery of godliness, God manifest in the flesh.' 'Truly this was the Son of God.' 'The iron did swim.'

2. This Jesus is risen from the dead. We might be staggered that one so good should have died at all, only we know and understand that He tasted death for every one of us. He was God's lamb, bearing away the world's sin. Yet we cannot wonder that He is risen. It would have been a challenge to the reality of His goodness, as well as to the validity of His redemptive work, had it been otherwise. 'He could not be holden of death.' St. Paul staked the entire validity of his gospel on this one great central fact. 'If Christ be not raised your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins.' Dr. Denney says—'When the apostles went forth to preach the gospel, they needed a more summary process of conviction. This they found in Christ's resurrection. That was an event standing alone in the world's history. There had been nothing like it before; there has been nothing like it since. But,' he adds, 'the men who were assured of it by many infallible proofs, did not presume to disbelieve it because of its singularity: amazing as it was, they could not but feel that it became one so unique in goodness and greatness as Jesus; it was not possible, they saw after the event, that He should be holden by the power of death: the resurrection only exhibited Him

in His true dignity; it declared Him to be the Son of God, and set him on His throne.' 'The iron did swim.'

3. There is also, as the complement of these two great facts, the spiritual resurrection and transformation of fallen, sin-blighted men. This is God's workmanship. To quicken those who were dead in trespasses and sins is of necessity a supernatural and Divine interference. It is the exercise of 'the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe, according to the working of the might of His power, which He wrought in Christ Jesus when He raised HIM from the dead and set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places.' 'Even when we were dead in sins, He hath quickened us together with Christ, and raised us up with Him and made us sit with Him in the heavenly places.' Now this may be regarded by those who know no better as wild and visionary, and as the raving of a diseased and disordered imagination. But for *us* it is simple, sober fact. We have seen it, and—what is far more—we ourselves have felt it. A Christian man must begin with his own personal experience. It is proof positive to himself. He is a very miracle of God's grace. He becomes a new evidence of Christianity; and he could as soon call in question his own existence, as hesitate to own and acknowledge the Divine force that has wrought this gracious change—making 'all things new.' The man in the gospel whose eyes Christ opened was safe and sure in his finding as to his own experience—'One thing I know, that whereas I was blind now I see,' but he was quite as certain as to the inference he drew—'Since the world began it was not heard that *any man* opened the eyes of

one that was born blind'—only God Himself could have done it.

And our personal observation adds abundant confirmation to this memorable experience of our own. Have we not all known men and women suddenly changed? They may have been plucked like brands out of the fire. Sin and Satan may have bruised and battered and broken them so utterly that the features of manhood were all but obliterated. Yet they were taken in hand and *possessed* by a mysterious but mighty and benignant force that completely changed the very current of their life, and renovated their being so marvellously that, like Naaman the leper, their flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and they were clean. Some, yea, many of us, have been witnesses of these miracles in the higher—the spiritual—sphere; but no mere written or spoken words can ever adequately convey to others the impression left on us, when we saw the new light of spiritual life dawn on a sin-darkened face.

And this that concerns ourselves enables us to understand and estimate the power of the early Apostolic Church. Everything was against them. They were obscure and unlettered men who led the forlorn hope. They were without means, or influence, or social position. Their message was to the Jews a stumbling-block, and to the Greeks foolishness. They had to attack pagan vice and crime and superstition. Yet they faced the ordeal, and went bravely forward. They seized and won for Christ the hearts and lives of those in whom this mysterious quickening took effect. And in this way eventually the new energy that was at work, and the men who represented it, came thundering to the very gates of Rome,

till saints were found in Cæsar's household, and the new force took effect in a way that hastened forward the decline and fall of the pagan Roman empire.

There is only occasion to note that the ideal of these renovated lives is *Christ Himself*. They are destined to be conformed to the image of God's Son. The power that wrought in Him is achieving miraculous triumphs in sanctifying and glorifying their life and character. They are now *in* Christ, and are growing *like* Him, and are soon to be *with* Him. 'For our citizenship is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things unto Himself.'

III. After the *admission* and the *assertion* we have made, there only remains that we consider the INSPIRATION needed in view of the tremendous work to be done. Inspiration is a necessity if we take in the difficulty of the situation. Ezekiel was profoundly moved when Jehovah said—'Son of man, can these bones live?' and he answered with reverence and awe in keeping with the dread occasion when he said—'O Lord God, Thou knowest.' There is room only for darkest despair if we regard exclusively the depths of evil in men, and in society, in our time. But if we accept the challenge to face and fight and overcome it, in God's name and in His great might, we may cherish highest hopefulness and confidence. Take things at their very worst to-day —and in all conscience they are bad enough—yet even now God is in the very heart of this business.

It is an appalling, heart-rending sight—*but these bones can live.*

And how? *Preach* and *pray.*

1. *Preach.* 'It hath pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.' Try to think of Elisha casting in that stick over the spot where the iron sank. It is a challenge. It risks God's character and his own prophetic name. So, too, Ezekiel, in response to Jehovah, stakes his all when he turns to prophesy to the bones. Peter and John over the lame man—they, too, make a perilous and awful venture. They risk their name and fame and apostolic commission. They stake the honour and glory and greatness of Christ. All is in danger for one moment of terrible suspense and anxiety. But it is soon over. The man stood up. The bones came together. The iron did swim.

But it might have been far otherwise. Try to imagine the terrible humiliation and disgrace if in any or all of these three cases there had been *failure* —if the lame man had lien still, if the bones had never moved, if the iron had remained at the bottom; both the servants and their Great Master would have been utterly discredited and dishonoured. And, indeed, the thing once actually happened. At the bottom of the transfiguration mount Christ's disciples tried to cure a poor demoniac boy—*and they failed.* They were conscious that their failure had placed them in a painfully false position. It is well that they were conscious of it, and anxiously asked—'Lord, why could not we cast him out?' And we must admire the generous view our Lord took of the situation—making full allowance for the difficulties of the case, and telling of the special need of

faith and prayer and fasting, if they could hope to rise to the height of this great argument and achievement. Brethren, we have this same solemn, sacred work in hand. The man who is a gospel preacher is in this true apostolic succession. He commits God to the success of his mission and message. He is bound to heal the sick, and open the eyes of the blind, and cast out devils, and raise the buried dead to resurrection life and power. The real danger is that in all this there may be failure, while we are not much concerned about it, or it may be not even conscious of the fact.

Verily this prophesying and preaching is a momentous business. 'Who is sufficient for these things?' Napoleon said that he went into the Franco Prussian war with a light heart. It ill became him. It was his death-knell. Woe to preacher, or teacher, or visitor, who goes to this sacred work with a light heart!

For, after all, the Church may only be a kind of half-way house between life and death. It is a great triumph to be able to attract and interest and impress the crowd. Yet it may sometimes happen that mere human sympathies alone bind the preacher and his audience; and while there may be many tokens of successful and honest work, it may only be as in Sardis, of which Christ said—'Thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.' A vast amount of SE. GO. good work is being done nowadays in the way of slumming and nursing and feeding and clothing—trying nobly and successfully to mitigate the miseries of the sunken masses. And the social aspects of our church life and work are more in evidence than formerly. We can do much to elevate and educate the

moral character, and to sweeten the breath of society. But all this will be but a poor apology for the absence of true spiritual life. It may *look* better than the dry bones. There may be splendid results of a kind. And they may be beautiful even in death. Yet it is as of old when the prophet said—'there was no breath in them.' 'There are two ways of regarding a sermon,' says Ruskin—'either as a human composition or a Divine message.' The latter is the higher and truer conception of the work of the preacher. As he truly says—'He has but thirty minutes to get at the separate hearts of a thousand men, . . . thirty minutes in which to raise the dead.' Yes, awful prerogative his! But the dread burden of his responsibility is this—it is a human composition and a Divine message both in one. The man is to be abundantly pitied who thinks he *can* preach! The best preacher's best sermon comes far short of the high ideal, and if he be a true-hearted man he will be the first to own it. And you that listen had need to be careful. You can admire, or criticise, or tear the work into shreds. Thus you can hinder the preacher; or you can marvellously help him, by your kindly consideration, and generous sympathy, and reverent reserve, and believing prayer. He needs them all. For, at the best, the awful work is poorly and ill done.

'They are tired of what is old,
We will give it voices new;
For the half hath not been told
Of the beautiful and true.'

2. God may give the preacher, as He gave to Isaiah—and a splendid gift it is—the tongue of the learned, that he may know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary; but He must also give

him '*the tongue as of fire*,' that the conscience may be reached and the heart moved and melted. And for this, over against the very best preaching, there must be PRAYER. After prophesying upon the bones, Ezekiel had to appeal to the wind. It is as needful for us as for him to prophesy to the *breath*. Herein lies the POWER. We have defined the function of the human preacher; and his share in this mystery is a sacred responsibility. We are not able to say where man ends and God begins, for here we are fellow-workers with God. All we can be sure of is this —that in speaking to men for God and to God for men, we are fully warranted and encouraged to expect the active manifestation of the quickening and life-giving power of the Holy Ghost.

We do not hear much of it in this generation, but when I was a boy I sometimes heard venerable and white-haired men, who knew full well the meaning of the words they used, speak with reverence and bated breath of some mysterious and rare peculiarity in a preacher. They called it '*unction*.' At the time I could not understand their meaning, and was almost afraid to ask them. And then the dictionary did not help me much. Even yet I feel as if on the very borderland of profoundest mystery when making mention of the word. Human language is too vague and undefined to convey its sacred significance. It is sympathetic, and magnetic, and electric, and human; but it is far more; for it is impalpable, and supernatural, and spiritual, and Divine. It is God's own anointing for the preacher's awful function. He may not be conscious of it himself at the moment— for even Moses wist not when the skin of his face did shine. But if the Spirit fill and possess and thrill

him, his hearers will soon come to understand what '*unction*' means, in 'thoughts that breathe and words that burn.'

Some three years ago I was walking through the streets of Chicago, and saw a fine new building with
Po. this notice posted up—'To let, *with* or *without power*.' The electric current was laid along the street, and was available for work if really wanted. I wonder if all our churches and congregations are not grievously at fault just here! We are within reach of this Spiritual Power if we will only realise it, and put ourselves in living connection. And what unspeakable results might follow! They are beginning to harness and yoke the vast resources of electric power in the Falls of Niagara. It is assumed and asserted that there is as much force in that one mighty waterfall, as will light the streets, and drive the cars, and turn the mill-wheels of all America. And hitherto it has all been wasted and lost. Have we not to-day inside the Church, and waiting being turned to account, enough latent and unused spiritual power to suffice for the evangelisation of the whole wide world?

'Suppose we saw an army sitting down before a granite fort,' says W. Arthur, 'and they told us that they intended to batter it down, we might well ask them—How? They point to a cannon-ball. Well, but there is no power in that; it is heavy, but not more than half a hundred, or perhaps a hundredweight; if all the men in the army hurled it against the fort, they would make no impression. They say, No, but look at the cannon. Well, there is no power in that. A boy may ride on it, a bird may perch in its mouth. It is a machine and nothing more. But look at the powder. Well, there is no power in that; a child

may spill it, a sparrow may peck it. Yet this powerless powder and powerless ball are put into a powerless cannon; one spark of fire enters, and then, in the twinkling of an eye, that powder is a flash of lightning, and that ball a thunderbolt, which smites as if it had been sent from heaven. So it is with our church machinery at this day; we have all the instruments necessary for the pulling down of strongholds—*and O for the baptism of fire!*'

II

THE NEW EXODUS OF THE SOUL

'For ye shall go out with joy, and be led forth with peace: the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle-tree: and it shall be to the LORD for a name, for an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.'—ISAIAH lv. 12, 13.

IT will not be necessary for us to fix definitely the date and historic setting of this exquisite gem of Hebrew poetry and prophecy, in order to grasp its deep, Divine teaching of moral and spiritual truth. There might be some real advantage if we could verify the occasion, and the circumstances in which the truth was originally spoken, and the direction in which it was intended to tell and work a change. At the same time, there may be something to be gained from the fact that the mere outward, accidental features of the case do not control or determine the operations of eternal truth. You can detect its mission, and trace its working in the many and varied phases of providential discipline; and it is often a relief and encouragement to find that Divine teaching is not tied down to the exact set of circumstances with which it was originally associated. These may have been quite arbitrary. And thus we are able to dissociate the truth here embodied and enunciated

with such extraordinary power and pathos, from the Bondage of Egypt, or the Captivity of Babylon, or the Jewish Dispersion, or from the repeated and multiplied and aggravated forms in which national faith and spiritual life shewed their terrible declension and decay. A psalm, or a song, or a sermon—all of them full of gospel truth and teaching—comes down to us through the ages. We are told that 'what is grey with age, to man is Godlike.' We know it is impressed with the Divine image, and has stamped on it the very hall-mark of heaven. But we do not need to trouble ourselves about the men and the time and the occasion. All that is only the scaffolding of the building, and when it has served its intended purpose, the best thing is that it should be cleared away and clean forgotten. There is a kind of fascination for some minds in trying to get away back and stand at the very well-head of revelation and inspiration, and witness the literal and historical details of the story. For most of us, I imagine, it will prove a more practical and profitable exercise, to endeavour, as best we can, to interpret the bearings of that ancient message from heaven on our own generation, and its application to our time and to ourselves.

The Old Testament prophet had a very severe and trying function to discharge. He was a kind of incarnation of the human conscience and the Divine heart. He was almost a priest. Listen to this same Isaiah—'Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts.' He takes to heart the nation's guilt, and feels it as much as his own, and

bears it as a heavy burden before the Lord. He seems to have got nearer men and nearer God than we do nowadays. Perhaps we might serve our generation to better purpose, if we had about us more of this weird, old, prophetic spirit, which would make the church the manifestation of the heart of God and the conscience of the world as well. The gospel ministry that is to evangelise the world must needs be prophetic as well as apostolic.

We have here—

I. THE EXODUS OF THE SOUL.

'For ye shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace, the mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.'

1. There is a literal exodus here. It is an outgoing, a forthcoming. It is the outcome of earnest conviction and spiritual impression. It is all the same, if it affects the nation, or the Church, or the individual. A new fire, of Divine kindling, has begun to burn in the soul. A voice has been heard, beckoning away from grovelling aims and sordid pursuits. The life of serfdom and bondage is now felt to be an unbearable burden. The weary, hollow, empty, aimless thing called life awakens a recoil and protest. The sinner, the slave, the drudge, becomes possessed with the sense of a lost ideal; and, in the might of his manhood, he rises to assert his liberty. It is the crisis of his life. It marks the dividing line between spiritual death and life. You may call it an awakening, a conversion, a new birth, a resurrection. You may try to describe it as the emancipation of the soul. You may get a fine, old-world, practical

illustration of its meaning, when Abraham, in response to the call of heaven, left his home and fatherland to become the father of the faithful and the friend of God. It is a heavenly instinct, working mysteriously in the depths of a human soul, awakening yearnings and longings after better, nobler, diviner things. It is the wish, the prayer, the purpose, the effort, the agonising struggle—

> 'That men may rise on stepping-stones
> Of their dead selves to higher things.'

But this exodus truly and manifestly expresses, and defines, and measures the contrast between the old life and the new. It may register the distance between Egypt and Canaan, between Babylon and Jerusalem, between the far country and the Father's house. It may mark, as in the splendid exodus of the Pilgrim Fathers from Old England to New, their deliberation and determination to put the wide Atlantic Ocean between their experience of the bitterness of tyranny and the sweets of liberty. When a man becomes animated and inspired by a new motive power and ruling passion, he is overpowered and overruled as by a great necessity. He *must* make the great renunciation. It is the exodus of the soul from the old world of self and sin, into the new world of consecration, and purity, and peace, and fellowship with heaven. The exodus from Eden was a memorable milestone in the development of the terrible tragedy of the Fall, the moral ruin of the human race. 'So He drove out the man.' And so, that ancient paradise was forfeited and lost, and for ever left behind. But this new exodus means that man turns to be the sworn enemy of his own old

sinful self, and begins the great, long, slow pilgrimage, backward, homeward, Godward, which at length will land him, renovated and purified, in the New Jerusalem—the very Paradise of God.

2. It is a glad exodus. 'Ye shall go out with joy and be led forth with peace.' True, there is in any case a tremendous wrench. It is all against the natural grain. It may involve the cutting off of a right hand, or the plucking out of a right eye. The exodus of a youth from his home among the hills, is a memorable landmark in a lifetime. And when a man makes up his mind to emigrate and seek a new home in a new world, there are old roots to be torn up which have twined themselves round and very near his heart; and it would be the merest affectation, or something worse, to argue that there is no strain or struggle involved in this new surrender of the soul. It is hard for flesh and blood to go through with it. The rich young ruler, who came running to Christ, as an anxious inquirer, went away—sorrowful. His great possessions ensnared and held him captive. And even so, instead of the great renunciation, he has come to be Dante's miserable shipwrecked and blighted soul—'who made, through cowardice, the great refusal.' But, notwithstanding this severe pressure from the wrong side, and in the wrong direction, when the heavenly summons comes, and the Divine call is heard, then there is no possible choice or alternative. The cost is counted and discounted. The disciples left their nets, and boats, and 'vested interests,' in response to the Master's high calling. 'Matthew the publican' left his tolbooth, and tax-gathering, and money-making, and made a feast to celebrate the happy occasion.

'What things were gain to me,' owns Paul, 'those I counted loss for Christ.' Listen to Ruth, the Moabitess. Her mother-in-law, Naomi—a friendless, penniless, disappointed old woman, intimates her resolve to return to Bethlehem. All the interests and sympathies of the two young widows bind them not to Canaan, but to Moab. Yet when the moment for parting came, though Orpah wept, and went away, Ruth was conquered and led captive, and nobly, bravely, beautifully, and like a true Christian, said—'Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest I will go; and where thou lodgest I will lodge; thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God. Where thou diest will I die, and there will I be buried. The Lord do so to me and more also, if aught but death part thee and me.' It was the great, new, spiritual exodus of her soul. Naomi had done true mission work while sojourning in the heathen land of Moab; and now Ruth clave unto her. She can afford cheerfully to turn her back on Moab, because she has resolutely, and for good, turned her smiling face to Naomi and Canaan—to Christ and heaven.

This joy and peace makes ample amends for any possible sacrifice. Quaint old George Herbert sweetly sings about good deeds by day making for him 'music at midnight.' The man or woman who has the courage to go forth, at the call of conscience, and duty, and Jesus Christ, renouncing all that blocks the way, may be sure and certain of being able to say —'Thou hast put gladness into my heart, more than in the time when their corn and their wine increased.' On the 18th of May 1843—the never-to-be-forgotten Disruption Day—474 ministers made a famous exodus.

In one day they signed away more than £100,000 of yearly income. Like the poor widow in the Gospel, it was all that they had—even all their living. They went forth in faith, casting themselves on the charity of God. True, they were sneered at by men who were incapable of either understanding the high principle that animated them, or of imitating their heroic example. They were branded as martyrs by mistake. The mistake was not theirs, however. It was for them a time of great spiritual joy, and abounding and abiding peace. Men of the world marked it, and were filled with holy awe and admiration. God repaid them an hundredfold for the sacrifice they made for conscience and for Christ. They went out with joy, and were led forth with peace—'joy and peace in believing.'

If any should be stumbling and hesitating on the very threshold of the Kingdom of God, let me say to them—'Why halt ye so long between two opinions?' Have warning lest ye hesitate, or take the wrong turning; and find encouragement in making a true and wise and worthy choice, since Christ Himself has given you His word, and bond, and security, that none shall ever suffer loss on account of their devotion and allegiance to Him.

3. Nature will show sympathy with you in this holy enterprise. 'The mountains and the hills shall break forth before you into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands.' It is not easy to define the true feeling for nature. The eye and the ear and the imagination need to be educated, in order to appreciate its wonders and interpret its lovely voices. Our Lord had a strangely beautiful feeling after nature. He lingered over it with exquisite

tenderness. We are all in danger of being blind to its true spiritual relationships and lessons. Charles Kingsley gave good advice, when he said—'Never lose the opportunity of seeing anything beautiful. Beauty is God's handwriting; it is a wayside sacrament.' And the late Professor Henry Drummond, speaking of the personal influence of Ruskin, makes this interesting confession—'He taught me to use my eyes. He taught me to see the world as it is, and it soon became a new world to me, full of charm and loveliness. Now I can linger beside a ploughed field, and revel in the affluence of colour and shade which are to be seen in the newly turned furrows; and I gaze in wonder at the liquid amber of the two feet of air above the brown earth. Now the colours and shades of the woods are a delight, and at every turn my eyes are surprised at fresh charms. The rock which I had supposed to be naked, I saw clothed with lichens—patches of colour—marvellous organisms, frail as the ash of a cigar, thin as brown paper, yet growing and fructifying, in spite of wind and rain, of scorching sun and biting frost. I owe much to Ruskin for teaching me to see.'

Have you never gone forth to enjoy the fresh, welcome, generous sympathy of nature? One memorable day, after weary weeks of seclusion and suffering, you were led out into God's beautiful world. It seemed all so new, and fresh, and young to you! The birds, and the flowers, and the waves, and the everlasting hills had all sweet and soothing voices of welcome and congratulation for you. Or, it may have been 'in the valley of decision,' when you were preoccupied with a great and holy resolve you had just made in the hidden depths of your being. You

thought it was a sacred, secret, unknown thing. And yet in some strange, unaccountable way, the voices of nature were proclaiming your secret, and singing their new song over it and over you. Bunyan once felt as if he must preach to the crows his new Christian experience. I wonder if it was not the case that the crows had, in their own blunt, rude, simple way, without his knowing it, begun first to preach to him! They knew his secret, and he claimed their sympathy.

But these same mountains and hills, and the virgin forests, may have, at first sight, presented insuperable obstacles in the way of this great exodus. They are the lions in the pilgrim's pathway. On account of them, timid and half-hearted men might faint and turn back. But the man of God, with holy purpose and high resolve, will only find fresh inspiration, and new incentive, in the very difficulties that lie between him and his spiritual destiny. Napoleon said he would either find a way across the Alps, or make one. Depend on it, icebergs and icefloes and icedrifts, and all the horrors of the Arctic world, were only like the welcome milestones, to a heroic soul like Nansen, whose mission and determination was to reach the Pole, or perish in the attempt. All the wild, dismal sights and sounds were only so many tokens of encouragement and good cheer. So, too, with Livingstone, the hero of the dark continent. In all the hardships and horrors he encountered, he only found as if the more irrevocably committed to the great enterprise of his truly consecrated life. The mountains and hills may be high, and the miles long and weary. In the dense forests there may be no way, and none to guide the tired wanderer's feet. Yet, 'an highway shall be there, and a way, and it shall

be called, The way of holiness; the unclean shall not pass over it; but it shall be for those: the wayfaring men, though fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor shall any ravenous beast go up thereon, they shall not be found there; but the redeemed shall walk there. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.'

II. The Moral Change it implies. 'Instead of the thorn shall come up the fir-tree, and instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle-tree.'

To a devout and patriotic Hebrew heart, it might seem natural to give a local and national interpretation to this great and gracious promise. And nobody will have any warrant to blame him, or dispute his finding. For it has always happened, that when anything went wrong with the people, their land was affected also. Even now they are a nation without a home and fatherland. But their home and land are being kept for their new exodus, and home-coming. A blight and a curse seem to rest on it meanwhile. It is given over to briers and thorns, nettles and thistles. The Turk and the Bedouin Arab may claim an alien's possession, but they cannot prosper or thrive there. When God's time comes, they will have to clear out: and the thorns and nettles will give place to the fir-tree and the myrtle-tree. Then the scattered nation will enjoy the heritage 'of many generations.'

But this can be only a very secondary conception of the promise. At its very heart it is moral and spiritual. It concerns individual men and women.

A poetic and graphic description is here presented of the workings of sin on the one hand, and grace on the other. The lessons taught are very solemn—

1. *About sin.* This is a very pitiful thing. It defines unrenewed human nature as a moral and spiritual waste—a bare, barren wilderness. It is a sluggard's garden where only the wild weeds are found. All is in neglect and ruin. Men are quick to make their boast of the dignity and worth of human nature. But, if this be true, there is little room for pride and pomp and circumstance among us. It only produces a crop of briers and nettles, 'which are rejected and nigh unto cursing—whose end is to be burned.' You may tell me I am severe and uncharitable and ungenerous in this estimate of fallen human nature. You may recall some noble and beautiful and gentle deeds. These are only as I have seen on a tree, a few leaves and blooms, surrounded by bare, black, dead branches on every side, telling unmistakably that it was dead at the heart and dead at the root—doomed and marked for the axe. Man's heart is a garden out of cultivation. The thorns and thistles grow wild and rank and luxuriant—a cursed crop. Terrible must be the discovery that life is thus wasted, and has run to ruin. This degenerate plant of a strange vine is branded with the curse of sin and the condemnation of heaven. 'The soul that sinneth it shall die;' and this is the token that spiritual death is closing in over the sin-weighted soul, and thus accomplishing its awful prerogative.

2. *Of grace.* Thank God this wild, waste wilderness may, by the power of Divine grace, be reclaimed, and renewed, and changed into the very garden of the Lord, full of the trees of righteousness of the Lord's

own planting. The briers and nettles may be rooted up, and cleared away, and set on fire. It is bound to be a rough business. The stern ploughshare of providence may have to dig, and trench, and tear its way into the heart-depths, breaking up 'the fallow ground.' This is painful and distressing experience enough. And no wonder. For it is the reclaiming and replanting of a lost Garden of Eden. The very worst has been uprooted and destroyed, and the very best has been put in its place. The fir-tree and the myrtle-tree—the useful and the beautiful are now planted side by side. 'Where sin abounded, grace doth much more abound.' 'The glory of Lebanon shall come unto them, the fir-tree, the pine-tree, and the box together, to beautify the place of my sanctuary: and I will make the place of my feet glorious.' Oh, to be able to mark and measure, in their true proportions, the depths of sin and the heights of grace, as we see the old, ugly life of thorns and nettles superseded by the new and beautiful life of the fir-tree, and the myrtle-tree, in ourselves and in those around us!

III. THE END TO BE SERVED. 'And it shall be to the LORD for a name, and for an everlasting sign, that shall not be cut off.' Many other ends may, directly and indirectly, be served at the same time. Man himself receives incalculable benefit from the gracious change. But the admission is frankly and freely made, that God desires that redeemed and renewed sinners shall be a credit and a glory to Himself. Every life rescued from sin, and confirmed in goodness, shall contribute to the end of glorifying His grace, and making His praise glorious. This will be attained in two ways—

1. It shall be to Him for *a name.* Jehovah has a name already—a great name. His fame and renown are published abroad, and spread far and wide, in His works of Creation and Providence. His wisdom and power give Him supreme and glorious Sovereignty. But He wants something that shall make His name transcendently great and famous, through all the realms of space, and through eternal ages. 'Thou hast magnified Thy word above all Thy name.' Thus it impresses the great heart of Godhead, that if He can grapple with sin in its strongholds, and get sinners to disown the tempter and the tyrant that has seduced and enthralled them, in the terrible entanglements of evil—if He can pay their debts, and buy back their long-lost freedom, and redeem their lives from destruction, and pluck them like brands out of the fire—then all such will be the trophies of His grace, and will enhance the glory of His great name unspeakably, and for evermore.

I have known a poor diseased sufferer, who came into the hands of a great surgeon: and after grappling with her trouble, and fighting the terrible battle with disease and death, with consummate skill and patience and tenderness, he at length gained the day, and sent her home completely cured. Ever since she has been proud of him: but he is none the less proud of her. She is, and, while she lives, shall be, to the good doctor 'for a name.' Her testimony—she herself—cured, and healed, and well—will commend his skill, and enhance his fame and name. Did you ever see the marvellous picture in the Royal Gallery of Dresden, which has a room all to itself, and is guarded, and shaded, and protected with lavish care and veneration? Lovers of art come on pilgrimage from

the ends of the earth, just that they may have the privilege of gazing on it with rapture and admiring wonder. It is one of the marvels of the world—'a thing of beauty and a joy for ever.' And it is to Raphael—the painter of it—'for a name'—an immortal name.

Did it ever strike you—any of you—as a thing within the range of possibility, that you might, in some such way and manner as this, be to the Lord for a name? Perhaps there is little or nothing else you could be or do, to any good purpose, for Him. You are possibly fretting that your sphere is so circumscribed, and your influence for good so limited. Are there not possibilities, all but infinite, at your service here? 'If you cannot speak for Christ,' M'Cheyne once said, at the close of a communion, 'you can at least be silent for Him.' All you need is, that you be cured of the disease of sin, and have the comeliness of Christ in your character; and then by a beautiful, unconscious influence, you shall commend Christ, and 'be to the Lord for a name.'

2. And *for an everlasting sign.* You may be sure, all the unhappy sufferers whom Christ miraculously healed, were stamped ever after with a kind of sacramental character. They would often be called upon to repeat their experience, and tell their gracious story. And so every redeemed man and woman is called and commissioned to be a kind of incarnate gospel—a sample and specimen and illustration of the omnipotence of the sovereign, saving grace of God. The very worst sinners will thus prove the very best signs. Paul says—'Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Christ Jesus might shew forth all long-suffering, FOR A PATTERN

to them who should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting.' What a rare honour and privilege is this, that saved sinners are called on to be themselves the references, and witnesses, and examples of what grace can be and do? Let us witness a good confession, and draw sinners and the seeking Saviour to one another. 'This honour have all the saints.'

And this sign will be *everlasting*. It will never be cut off—never be taken down. After the wars are over, the victors gather the spoils, and carry homeward the trophies. The old colours of the brave regiments are hung high in St. Paul's or St. Giles'—the very symbols and sacramental signs of the history and the hopes, the past and the future, of the nation's life. And even so, high up there in heaven—how many of the Great, and the Gifted, and the Good are being carefully and reverently assigned their place in the general assembly and Church of the Firstborn, written in heaven—to be to the Lord for a name and an everlasting sign, never to be taken down!

III

THE SPIRIT TEACHING A DYING SAINT TO SING

'Although my house be not so with God; yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure; for this is all my salvation, and all my desire, although He make it not to grow.' —2 SAMUEL xxiii. 5.

'THE Spirit of the Lord spake by me,' David says, 'and His word was in my tongue.' These are his last words. They form the dying confession and testimony of a good old man. Through life he had known many changes, and his cup had been full to overflowing both with prosperity and adversity. And yet it is matter for wonder that we are indebted to David's sorrows for most of his Psalms. Just like those flowers whose sweetest fragrance is only discovered when they are crushed and broken, David's heart was bruised and torn right frequently, and has given forth that blessed balm which has been instrumental in healing the broken-hearted, and comforting the sorrow-laden ever since. His songs are sweetest when they have to struggle up through tears. He sings and weeps at once. And when others would have hung their harps on the willows, and refused to sing at all, his strains are at such times loftiest, and richest, and best.

But we must not wonder that these old Psalms should fit into the genuine religious experience of all the ages, and of all believers. They were written by a believer. We have evidence and assurance enough that they were divinely inspired; yet it is not on that account the less true that they have come through a truly human mould, and are the outcome of a heart and life exercised just like our own. This makes them what they are to us. It brings them home. Like Jesus Himself—the Word made flesh—they are Divine, else they did not come to us from far enough away; and they are also human—thoroughly, emphatically human—else they could not come near enough. And it is this intense expression of the Christian consciousness—if we may call it such—which lends to them such a wondrous charm, and makes them so essentially catholic. They are for the Church universal. We may safely measure our true spirituality by our taste for, and sympathy with them. I have heard it said that, in far foreign lands, a fragment of old song will sometimes awaken profound emotion, and betray into tears those who have long been wanderers, because it revives old hallowed memories of home and fatherland that will not die. This is as true of grace as of nature. The songs of Zion grow into the believer's very heart and soul, awakening his truest sympathies, and stirring his grandest hopes. They become part of himself; and his memory is making of them material for immortality.

We have a supreme interest, then, in seeking reverently to study a text like this, indicative as it is of the hopes and fears, the trials and triumphs of one who has cheered us in many a 'cloudy and

dark day,' and given us, it may be, oftener than we are aware, 'songs in the night.'

1. The first thing that meets us here is—DAVID'S CROSS. 'Although my house be not so with God.' This was a sad confession. It must have wrung the old man's heart. He had come to the end of his earthly pilgrimage; and now, as he reviews his chequered and strange career — so marked and memorable with turnings and windings and overturnings—so full both of joy and sorrow—with such grand chapters in it, full of Divine grace and glory, and faithful, tender discipline—one thing more than all else gave him concern and anxiety. The state of his domestic circle was matter for deep grief to him. His house was 'not so with God.' His enemies had been those of his own household. Of his numerous family hardly any were turning out well. During the latter years of his reign, this had been to him a very bitter trial. With the one exception of Solomon, perhaps, they had all sadly vexed him; and one had actually risen up in unnatural rebellion, seeking to dethrone and destroy him. And, noble and honoured though his course through life had been, yet there were bitter and bloody memories that cast dark shadows back across it all.

But his chief anxiety regarding it must have arisen in connection with the Divine promise. He had the firm conviction that it might have been 'so.' The heavenly assurance had given him reason to expect that it would have been 'so.' His had been an earnest and oft-repeated prayer, that it might be 'so.' He had been cherishing the fond ambition that David's son should be 'David's Lord.' He was

anxiously looking forward. For the Lord had made a covenant with him, and 'spoken also of His servant's house for a great while to come.' And yet, as he looked on to coming generations, all seemed dark and hopeless; for his children's children were graceless, and to all appearance the covenant he had clung to seemed to fail.

But the real bitterness of this cross to David must have been the consciousness of his own unfaithfulness. Conscience made a coward of him. Old sins rose up before him, and made him weak and feeble in the effort to mould and train his children. He could not ask them to follow good paths, when he did not himself lead the way. He wanted that moral power and influence over them which might have done much to foster grace in their young hearts. His example sometimes belied his precept. And one black memory, with which every one was sadly familiar, would do much to weaken the weight of his authority, if not to shame him into silence before them. Sad enough, in any circumstances, to have to make such a confession as this; but oh! how unspeakably is that sadness increased, when it turns out that the sorrows which had distracted his home, and made it unhappy, were only the bitter fruits of his own sin.

Nevertheless, this cruel cross had some good purposes to serve. For one thing—*it kept him humble.* It was a dangerous experiment, as the world would say, to take a shepherd boy and make a king of him. 'Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I took thee from the sheep-cote, from following the sheep, to be ruler over my people, over Israel' (2 Sam. vii. 8). He was suddenly exalted. It is not easy to carry a full

cup. Perhaps he needed a cross to keep him low. Paul needed a thorn in the flesh, lest he should be exalted above measure. And so with all the saints of God. They have joy and sorrow set over against each other, so as on either side to check the leanings, and be the guardian, of the soul.

But more than this, his cross did much to make David *a man of prayer*. It gave him many an errand to the throne of the heavenly grace. We find his Psalms oftentimes as if *steeped* in sorrow. Doubtless the parchment on which the dear old Hebrew melodies were written must, in many an instance, have been blotted and blistered with his tears. His sore trial served to bring him near the mercy-seat, and to keep him waiting right under the shadow of heaven. There he prayed, and wept, and sung. Sorrow bent his knee and tuned his harp. Thus did he linger very near the throne of the Eternal; and when most completely emptied and laid low—crying 'from the depths'—he was heard, and drawn away into sympathy with High Heaven—'a man after God's own heart.' Had all been well, his home happier, his family holier, and his house 'so with God,' we might have missed many a grand old Psalm, and David himself the blessed privilege of many a prayer.

There are not many of us whose lives are not saddened by some cross. Few, if any, have everything just as they would like. There is a crook in every lot. Each one has some unkindly thing which overshadows life, and becomes the occasion of pain and sorrow. And, indeed, to not a few, it assumes this very form. How many that have come after David can sympathise with him concerning his cross,

because of having had to endure it themselves! What heavy burdens to believing parents are unconverted children! What perplexity and care are involved often in seeing sons and daughters grow up, unsaved —proof against all the hallowed influences of home! Some have this burden lying very heavy on their hearts. It gives a sombre colouring to their whole life. To many it seems as if this were the only drawback to their happiness and contentment in all the world.

But the bitter element in this cup is, that the unhappy state of matters awakens sad reflections, on the part of many, regarding themselves. They are only too fully aware of their own unfaithfulness. They feel that their cross is, in large measure, a thing of their own making. Few can clear themselves, or deny that, had they been more true to God and to their children, their cross might have been greatly modified, if not entirely taken away. By the work of their own hands they have made it heavy, in the measure in which their weakness, or worldliness, or indulgence, has told on their youthful ones. This very consciousness weakens the back for the burden, and unfits it to endure. This formed the root and bitterness of King David's sorrow; and they are truly happy who can free themselves from any such blame, and are strangers to any such trouble.

But it must not be too hastily concluded that such a cross as this, or indeed any cross whatever, is an unqualified calamity. Its mission may be very benignant and blessed. Who can tell but that, in the wise and gracious purpose of Heaven, it may be one of the very best of all your experiences! As things are, it has the effect of making you ill at ease and

dissatisfied with yourself. That, of itself, is not necessarily a misfortune. Your cup is not full. You have a great want, and are constrained to own and lament it. And you have often thought, and sometimes said, that if this evil were only removed, you would have almost all you cared for, or wished to have on earth. Yet take heed and consider what such a blissful change might involve. You say it would make you comfortable, contented, happy. No care, or grief, or fear to burden you! Think you, would that be safe for you? Might there not be danger, lest you should grow proud, self-satisfied, self-righteous? A wretched self-complacency might overtake you—leading you to think more highly of yourself than you ought to think. And even though you complain that your trial is awfully bitter, and such as almost to tempt you to imagine some cruel and malignant fate must be in pursuit of you, wounding the part of your nature which is most tender and susceptible, and causing you to fret and quarrel with it as the doing rather of an enemy than a friend; though you feel you could have endured almost any other trial more willingly and more easily than this which has been laid on you; still, that may be the very reason why it is so with you. The painful form it has assumed is a very necessity, if it is truly to discharge its function at all. Had it assumed a milder form, or been more easily borne, you would have laid it less to heart, and no real good might have come of it. Ah, brother! be thankful if God's sharp knife is cutting deep, and very near the citadel of thy soul; for there is everlasting love in the Great Heart, and Divine skill in the Right Hand that wields it. Think well of thy cross, child of God, if

it keep thee in 'the low lands of sorrow,' where the graces of the Spirit are wont to flourish best—

> 'Love thou thy sorrow, grief will bring
> Its own excuse in after years;
> The rainbow—see how fair a thing
> God can build up from tears!'

But more; that cross has done for you most blessed service in bringing you to your knees. Oh! is not that a precious boon which gives you an errand to the throne of grace? How great a curse had it been for you to have had no burden pressing heavy on your heart, relief from which you could only find in prayer! But for that you had grown cold-hearted and careless long since. This cross of yours, and the intense longing for its removal, has provoked many an anxious and earnest cry from your heart; and perhaps you are indebted to it for very much of any Divine fellowship you enjoy. You have seen sailors fling ropes from the ship to the shore, to be there fastened by friendly hands. They did not hope thereby to bring the shore to them, but themselves to it. And even so, God sometimes delays the answer to prayer, in order that the praying heart may, by this holy exercise, be drawn close up to the very heart of God, and there prepared for the answer when it comes. In this way trials turn into privileges, and crosses become stepping-stones heavenwards.

II. The next thing we are called to notice is—DAVID'S CONSOLATION. 'Although my house be not so with God; yet He hath made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure.' It is manifest from the connection of these two

clauses that, in the Psalmist's mind, God's promise and his own experience were placed over against each other. The two things appeared to be contradictory. The Divine faithfulness seemed compromised and unworthy of credit. Still the old saint's faith fails not. He clings to the covenant, and it comforts him. All his ill fortune will not shake his confidence in his Covenant God, or induce him to question for a moment His veracity. In spite of his sad circumstances, the bargain has been made, and will hold good; and the God who made it will vindicate His consistency. His honour is unchallenged. Since *He* hath made the covenant with *me*, it cannot by any possibility break down or fail.

1. The covenant to which David here clings can easily be identified. Doubtless it assumed a very personal and tender aspect to him, and must have been regarded as an assurance that his royal line should be continued, and that from him should be descended the coming Prince of Peace. Perhaps he had cherished some fond dream of seeing its fulfilment ere he passed away. But this was not, and could not possibly have been, even to him, the only or the ultimate form of the covenant. He must needs have fallen back on the gracious covenant made with Abraham and the Hebrew Fathers—that plan of God wherein the eternal purpose of grace is revealed as the security for sinners when there is none in themselves—that arrangement made for men wherein their faithfulness was not assumed, and which cannot be annulled or broken through by any failure or shortcoming on the part of the sinner; for in the everlasting plan any such contingency was anticipated and especially provided against. And so, these

covenant blessings are things which cannot be alienated by my badness, any more than they can be secured by my goodness. It is all of grace. And accordingly, it will have an everlasting future, as it has had an everlasting past, and can know no change for ever. Divine love and goodness are hereby made over to all whom that everlasting covenant embraces, on the most unquestionable and most absolute security possible or conceivable—the eternal, gracious, sovereign purpose of Jehovah.

2. And this everlasting covenant was '*ordered in all things*.' He was not, could not by any possibility be, the victim of caprice or chance. The untoward events he lamented did not annul the covenant in his estimation. Though he was not able to reconcile the two, yet he had faith enough to believe that all his experiences were only successive stages of the ordered covenant. He was willing to accept the assurance that his cross was part of it, and that in God's time and way the faithfulness and goodness of the heavenly discipline would appear. This might not make it any the less a cross to him, but it would make it clear that it was ordered, and would be blessed; and that when its purpose was accomplished, it would pass away, and ultimately would actually help in the realisation of that which it now appeared so mysteriously to hinder.

3. It came accordingly to be '*sure*'—sure as to the end to be gained, as well as to the means tending, however hopelessly, in that direction. And thus, though the outward look of things was quite away from what the promise indicated—though the events he was mourning over seemed actually to contradict it—though his prayers for the things promised were

all unanswered and vain apparently—still his faith never failed. He fell back on the covenant. He was satisfied regarding both its conditions and its security. God was Himself committed to it; and He was dealing out to him, in their full and blessed detail, 'the sure mercies of David.'

Now, it is worthy of very careful remark, that this resting-place for David's faith is within reach of any one of us. For it was simply this, that although he did not and could not see it, yet God's covenant-purpose was being accomplished. Surely this is a truth laden with unspeakable comfort and consolation to any child of God. Very commonplace and uninteresting it may look when regarded abstractly, yet in reality it lies very near the heart. Are you taking hold of that covenant, with all its provisions and promises—for yourself and for your children—for the body and the soul—in reference to both time and eternity? Do you really believe in it, as everlasting, ordered in all things, and sure? Then, I tell you, you are provided with a refuge, against which neither earth nor hell can ever prevail. And, whatever be your lot—however strange your experiences—however much your will may be crossed, and your wishes thwarted—however many prayers you may have unanswered, and desires ungratified—though your heart be broken with care and sorrow, and adversity be crushing you down—though among friends and children there be heedless souls in plenty, and your 'house be not so with God'—yet if you grasp it manfully and well, and, taking your stand on it as the very Rock of Ages, go confidently to God and say—'Have respect unto Thy covenant,' then assuredly you shall prevail. You will find a Covenant God

faithful, and His promise sure and true, if not here, at least in heaven.

III. But we have a third thing here—DAVID'S RESIGNATION. 'For this is all my salvation, and all my desire.'

1. *All my salvation*—as if he would have us believe that, save for this, he must have given all up in despair. Had not the covenant come to his rescue, he had failed, and fallen, and become an utter castaway. For himself, it is all his salvation; his only hope as a sinner takes its beginning from it. It is his gospel. Christ is the Angel of the Covenant to him. You will find it illustrated and verified in your own experience. You remember the hour when your eyes were opened, and for the first time you made the discovery that you were a lost soul. Sin's burden was crushing you down to hell. There was no hope, and no help. You were giving up in despair. You could do nothing. When, lo! in a blessed moment, Jesus Himself came near, and opened His heart, and saved a lost one. Then He became all your salvation. He was to you what the covenant was to David; for He was its exponent and representative, and your salvation and his are the very same. In both it is salvation by grace through faith. It is like a drowning man in the last of life and hope, and on the very edge of doom, to whom comes the lifeboat, and he is lifted up, and taken in, so that it becomes all his salvation. And henceforth, that covenant and the Christ of it, become to the saved one the guardian of his saved life. All his interests are secured. All his times are in God's hand, and all things are working together for his good. Jesus

Christ is his only Saviour. He saves him all through, in all things, and always. 'This God is our God for ever and ever. He will be our Guide even unto death'—'all our salvation.'

But it means more than even this. As for himself, so also for his house and family, this covenant was all his salvation. But for the fact that it was on his side, he would have given up all hope concerning them long ago. Have we not sometimes crossed the path of some fond mother whose heart has been crushed by some wayward, prodigal boy? As you get near her, you will discover a sore struggle between high hope and dark despair concerning him. Yet hope prevails and faith triumphs, and with tears she will tell you, that she dare not, cannot, give him up. She clings to the covenant, and so follows the erring youth with her prayers. The covenant alone —and surely it is enough—keeps her up, and hope lives and lingers in her bosom. It is all her salvation.

Praying fathers and mothers, persevere. You may have little or nothing else to encourage you, but at the very worst you have the covenant. Let it become all your salvation concerning godless, graceless children, and eventually you shall succeed. There comes in, I frankly admit, the mystery of the Divine Sovereignty; and, in the estimation of some, I am aware, it hangs like a gloomy shadow, even over the covenant and its promise. Why should it? Surely in its highest bearing that sovereignty sustains the promises, and confirms the covenant provisions, and befriends the humble suppliant when He says—'According to your faith be it unto you.'

I have sometimes tried to imagine that the penitent thief was the son of a praying mother. Think of her

as a devout mother in Israel. Early left a widow, that boy is her only care. She tries to train him well, and he grows up familiar with her tears and prayers. Gradually he begins to show signs of impatience with the restraints of home. Evil companions lead him astray. In a while he runs away. From bad to worse he drifts downwards, till at length he joins a gang of thieves. Heart-broken and despairing, his mother can only pray. Her hope seems to have died out. At last she hears of his arrest. She hastens to the city, and forms one of yonder company of weeping women on the way to Calvary. Her son—so long prayed for, 'with strong crying and tears'—is crucified that day, and dies a felon's death. The promise seems to have utterly failed, and he is mourned over as for ever lost. That poor woman returns home, droops, and in a little while dies of very grief and shame, and only knows when she enters heaven that the covenant is *sure*, and that her prodigal had gone there before her.

2. *All my desire.* This is a higher and nobler confession of faith even than what goes before. It was only negative, affording refuge in circumstances very desperate and forlorn; while this indicates the attainment of high and holy confidence in God, both comforting and satisfying. It rises on the ruins of the very last vestige of self-will and self-seeking. Truly that is a happy frame of mind which can, not merely accept of all the Lord chooses to send, and acquiesce in all His ways, but can come the length of saying—'This is all I wish or care to have. This covenant is all my desire, and Jesus Christ, who is enshrined in the very heart of it, is "the

chiefest among ten thousand, and altogether lovely." My life is only an unfolding of the covenant-purpose of everlasting love—a blessed discipline of grace.' Oh! I think there is in this man's attitude a picture of moral heroism, unequalled by almost anything I know on earth; accepting of all that comes—the smiles and tears, the joys and sorrows, the hopes and anxieties, the trials and triumphs, life itself and death, Christ and heaven—as covenant blessings, and having no wish or wilfulness in all the heart remaining! 'Delight thyself in the LORD, and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart.' He shall Himself become and be all thy salvation and all thy desire.

IV. It only remains to note briefly, by way of conclusion, DAVID'S ASSURANCE. This appears from the sentiment with which the text concludes—'Although He make it not to grow,' or rather, as the German translation has it—'Shall He not make it to grow?' As if he meant to say—'Although my house be not so with God, yet it shall one day be otherwise, for the covenant gives assurance of it. God Himself shall make it grow; and I am dying in the certain hope of it.'

This gives, if possible, additional grandeur to the whole scene. For it presents to us the sublime spectacle of a dying man serving himself heir to a promise, that was only to grow real long after he was dead. He thus testifies for God, and the covenant, to those he was leaving behind him, and with his dying breath urges them to conform to the grand design of heaven concerning them.

Thus we see that faith is not fatalism, merely

yielding to blind fate. Where true faith exists, it will show itself by works. Some simple souls profess to accept the provisions of the covenant, and fold their hands in indolence and indifference. Strange trust in God that which awakens no desire, and puts forth no effort to gain its end! Be sure your faith in the Divine promise is only true and real when it impels you to earnest effort and holy purpose to see its fulfilment. At your peril, brother, lie down and waste the blessed hours and influences at your disposal now,—urging the vain plea that you are waiting for God to do His work. Who knows—He may be waiting for you! Arise, and manfully do what work lies to your hand; and if you must work in the dark, and walk by faith in reference to its results, yet learn from this dying saint of old to testify for God, and bequeath to those you love, with your latest breath, your hope concerning their conversion; and if the joy of seeing it fulfilled is denied you on earth, it may only be so because it is reserved for heaven.

IV

FROM STRENGTH TO STRENGTH

'Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of His understanding. He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might He increaseth strength. Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall: but they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint.'—ISA. xl. 27-31.

THERE is not, in all the circle of Christian doctrine, any more practical or pressing subject for consideration than that of strength. Amid the tear and wear, the stress and strain of commonplace effort, and everyday life, as well as patient endurance of suspense and suffering, and the unceasing conflict with evil, the one thing that will make life worth living is to have a sufficient and enduring supply of strength within our reach and at our service. Perhaps I ought to say, in addition to this, that if we would be strong, we must get into the happy secret of appropriating and using the strength provided as occasion and necessity may require. Nothing on earth can be more miserable than the perpetual fear of coming to want; while the assurance of enough and to spare as long as need shall last, is fitted to lighten many

burdens and make the heart sing for joy. Some years ago a poor woman was left a friendless and penniless widow. She had come through sore tribulation, and looked older than her years. She was worn and wasted and sad at heart. A few of us were led to take an interest in her, and as we thought she had not long to live, we subscribed among us enough to purchase for her a modest annuity to make life-long provision for her wants. It had a very remarkable effect. This poor widow immediately began to revive. The burden of anxiety was lifted from her heart, and in a few weeks she began to look ten years younger. That wistful, care-worn look of hers was utterly banished from her face, and she lived to a good old age—a bright, sunny, happy, useful, Christian woman, serving her generation by the will of God.

Now, to compare earthly things with heavenly, we are fully warranted to believe that, as the poor widow was provided for, and had the right to take the full comfort of it while life lasted, so every single believer in Christ is fully warranted to expect that to all time and to all eternity, there will be an ample provision of grace and strength. There shall be no want to them that fear Him.

It looks as if there had been occasion to accentuate this same doctrine in the old Hebrew days; and Isaiah, in this thrilling and eloquent outburst of Christian consolation, lays deep and sure the foundation for lessons of trust in the Divine strength, which if they were only learnt and acted on, in these worldly and weary times of ours, would invest our evangelical religion with new winsomeness and grandeur, and leave many—who have been quite

needlessly 'careful and troubled about many things' —free to forget themselves, and undertake new and needed service for God and for humanity.

I. STRENGTH PROVIDED. 'Why sayest thou, O Jacob, and speakest, O Israel, My way is hid from the LORD, and my judgment is passed over from my God? Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, fainteth not, neither is weary? there is no searching of His understanding. He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength.' There is implied in all this a complaint. The prophet has to meet a challenge. 'There has been neglect and carelessness and forgetfulness. God is preoccupied. He is too busy, and has too much to do. He does not know about me; or, if He does, He will not take the trouble to interfere, and come to my help.' This is the language which betrays a morbid spirit, and an unbelieving heart. It is the perverse tone of a peevish, petted, spoilt child. Many of us have a certain sympathy with the plaint, for often enough it has been our own. We may have come to see how hasty and unwarranted and unworthy it was, and confess and lament our folly. Yet in certain experiences, and in unhealthy moods, it is a natural and human and even Christian infirmity. The seventy-third Psalm is full of it. 'When I thought to know this, it was too painful for me; until I went into the sanctuary of God.' Isaiah brings us there; and, withdrawing the curtain, opens before our astonished vision the whirling wheels of providence and grace, making all things work together for good

to God's own, and certifying abundantly that the way and the judgment of His people are amply considered and cared for, under His gracious administration.

1. His resources are *inexhaustible*. The prophet endeavours to enlarge the horizon of these groaning, grumbling Israelites. He seeks to withdraw their thoughts from themselves, and fix their gaze on 'the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.' You dare not measure and limit Him by your own littleness. Look out on the stars and seas and everlasting hills, and say, if you dare, that the great Creator can grow tired and weary and exhausted —so as not to be able to undertake for you! Omnipotence and Omniscience lie behind the works of His hands. 'The LORD doth build up Jerusalem: He gathereth together the outcasts of Israel. He healeth the broken in heart, and bindeth up their wounds. He telleth the number of the stars; and He calleth them all by their names. Great is our Lord, and of great power, His understanding is infinite.' All His works praise Him—the infinitely great and the infinitely little. Perfection and strength are imprinted on them all, whether it be the mechanism of a planet, or the structure of a tiny insect's wing. The reign of law in nature and providence and grace is supreme. 'The LORD reigneth.' 'Trust ye in the LORD for ever, for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength.'

2. The strength is *in Him*. 'Surely, shall one say, in the LORD have I righteousness and strength.' That moment becomes the turning-point in a sinner's life, in which he makes the discovery that his righteousness is in Christ—in God—in heaven. It is

at once a Divine revelation and a Divine inspiration. But the mistake is often made of imagining that the righteousness and the strength are separated. The one is imagined to be in the Lord ; the other in the sinner himself. Hence he supposes he is sent a warfare at his own charges, and must fight and conquer by the might of his own right arm. Hence too, the delusion that the storehouse of strength is to be found in the church, or ordinances, or priest, or sacraments, or outward symbols, or empty forms of any kind whatever. False conceptions as to this vital Christian doctrine have paralysed and enfeebled religious life in the experience of multitudes. They have been flung back upon themselves : and all their own efforts, with the hollow sympathy and fictitious aid the Church affected to bestow, only put them to shame, in sore disappointment and humiliation. Only when this experimental lesson of defeat has been truly taught and carefully learned, is the sinner inclined to look away from himself, and from the outward and earthly resources that had failed him, and to find with relief and satisfaction, that his strength, as certainly as his righteousness, is in God alone.

3. It is bestowed *as it is needed.* The Hebrews were taught this very practical lesson, when in the wilderness they had to gather fresh manna every morning. And it is the same with us when we are taught to pray—'Give us this day our daily bread.' It is a mark of the true childlike disposition, when we are willing to leave our treasures in our Father's keeping, and are content to come to find grace in time of need. And no one of the children need fear to come too often, or ask too much. It is as if you

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came and filled your little cup out of the full, and flowing, and overflowing river. It will be a long time ere your little cupful drain the river dry. A preacher tells of having met a rustic youth on the banks of Loch Katrine, at the Glasgow water-works; and he asked him if he were not afraid lest the needs of the great city should some day drain and empty the loch. He only smiled and said incredulously—'*It maks nae odds!*' And the youth was about right; for one of the engineers of the works has since told me that sometimes as much water flows into the loch in a single day, as Glasgow takes out of it in a whole year. Child of God, when will you learn to understand the vastness of your resources, and come to draw out of the Divine fulness, treasured there specially in view of your necessities, grace for grace and strength for strength? 'My God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus.'

4. It is a wonderful *gift*. The race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong. There are vicissitudes and uncertainties in the battle of life that make it very hard to anticipate, with any show of confidence, who shall win the day. Often it turns out that the first are last and the last first. For there is a mysterious Divine element that needs to be reckoned with and taken into account. To this men of the world are mostly blind, and hence the mistakes and miscalculations and misadventures they so frequently make. For 'He giveth power to the faint, and to them that have no might He increaseth strength.' Simple faith can in this way render humble men, and timid, sensitive, shrinking women so brave and fearless and strong, as to be absolutely

invincible. For service and warfare, for suffering and waiting, for sorrow and loss, for temptation and endurance, for cross-bearing and the crook in the lot, for the severe and terrible strain of living and dying—only the promised grace and strength of our Covenant God can make us equal to the task. It gave Abraham the sublime courage to sacrifice his son. It made Moses strong to crush the Pharaoh, and set God's people free. It made Job the symbol of Christian patience. It took away from Daniel the terrors of the lions' den. It made Paul's weakness equal to the thorn in the flesh. It has sustained and comforted apostles and confessors and martyrs and covenanters in dark days of persecution and cruel suffering and violent death. And in all the ages it has amazed the humble saints of God to find how very real and all-sufficient the Divine strength has been for them in all their necessities and emergencies.

II. Strength Weakened. 'Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall.' Strength and youth and beauty awaken admiring appreciation. Natural human strength is a fine, if it is, in some cases, a dangerous, gift. It may consist in strength of limb, and muscle, and sinew, and nerve, and wind; or there may be in addition strong will and power of endurance. It may happen that the consciousness of this great possession does lead to vanity, and hardness, and independence. And this gift is oftentimes prostituted to ignoble and unworthy uses. Sometimes indeed strength becomes a positive weakness, and brings with it a curse. For it may awaken within him whose it is an altogether false idea of his power; and, like Goliath of Gath, he

may challenge and defy both man and God. This natural human activity and vital energy is certainly the main enemy of spiritual strength, because those who are in possession of the one think themselves in a position to despise, as they think they can afford to dispense with, the other altogether. But it is a shortsighted and mistaken policy. It soon comes to grief and humiliation. And it is well it should be so. For this false strength is the rubbish that must needs be cleared out and swept away in order to provide a sure foundation for building up the spiritual strength on its ruins. It is hard work for a young, strong nature, and an iron will, to give way. For nature may be brave and manly, and may look so very like to grace as sometimes to be mistaken for it. Yonder at Peniel you see Jacob. A mysterious man wrestles with him all through that livelong night, even unto the breaking of the day. Jacob was strong, but the stranger was stronger; 'and when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him.' God had weakened him into strength. And though ever after, even to his dying day, he was a poor, limping, halting creature, and carried about with him everywhere the token of that never-to-be-forgotten struggle and humbling defeat, still God blessed him there, and changed his name to Israel—'for,' He said, 'as a prince thou hast power with God and with man, and hast prevailed.'

I have heard men tell of the risk and danger that attend the effort to rescue and save a drowning man. If you do not take good heed, he may in wild desperation clutch his deliverer, and drag him under,

involving the destruction of both together. The wise thing is to keep him at a safe distance till he has become exhausted and his strength has failed. Then, when he has no power left, either to help himself, or endanger the life of his benefactor—when he is passive and at the very point of death—it is safe and easy to accomplish the task of saving him. Such is the discipline of grace also. Some who may be passing through it, and are at their wits'-end in trying to understand it, will find the explanation here. The little Greek nation has recently been passing through a terrible ordeal which affords a good illustration of the case before us now. Their national sympathies and aspirations led them to risk the fortunes and misfortunes of war with the Turks, in the interests of the liberties of Crete. They fought with a certain measure of pluck and valour; but, as was to be expected, they were overpowered and crushed, and have had to surrender, and ask the Powers to interfere and arrange terms of peace. Only bitter experience will teach this lesson of humbling and emptying, and it becomes a memorable chapter in the religious history of all who live through it.

Where this gracious exercise takes firm hold, and does its work effectively, the results are marvellously blessed. Think of the Syro-Phœnician woman. Her trouble was unspeakably great, and she was treated at first with apparent harshness and lack of sympathy. How many of us would have lost our temper and resented the cruel cold rebuff? But she knew better. She meekly took the place and claimed the portion of the dogs under the table. When it looked as if everything was lost, all was won. 'The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell gat hold

upon me: I found trouble and sorrow. Then called I on the name of the LORD; O LORD, I beseech Thee, deliver my soul. Gracious is the LORD, and righteous; yea, our God is merciful. The LORD preserveth the simple: *I was brought low, and He helped me.*'

III. STRENGTH RENEWED. 'BUT they that wait on the LORD shall renew their strength.' The natural strength has gone. 'Even the youths shall faint and be weary, and the young men shall utterly fall.' The thing has happened. The prophecy has been literally fulfilled. And now there is full scope and opportunity for the renewal and restoration. There is no competition. The spirit, thus weakened, and exhausted, and emptied of self, is quiescent and receptive; and occasion is freely afforded for the communication of the miraculous supply of Divine strength. And when at length, after the weariness and 'winter of our discontent,' it flows in and floods the soul with the consciousness of new, spiritual, Divine Power, then we become baptized and possessed with the new inspiration and enthusiasm of humanity, which makes us 'more than conquerors.'

1. It comes of *waiting on the Lord.* What this waiting really means must be experienced in order to be understood. It takes effect in the deep places of the soul, and the exercise is almost too sacred to be translated into human language. It lies 'too deep for tears,' or even for words; and with its aloneness a stranger cannot intermeddle. It may be likened to some poor captive bird imprisoned in a cage. The silly, timid, frightened creature has flung itself, in impotent fury, against the bars. It is bruised and torn.

Baffled and defeated, it has to give in when its strength is gone. And now, with broken wings and bleeding feet, it lies panting, and throbbing, and prostrate on the floor of its prison, when some kindly, friendly hand opens the door and lifts it out, and sets the prisoner free. Or that dove, sent forth to explore and measure the dismal waste of waters, which finds no rest for the sole of its foot, and at last returns exhausted and tired, and waits till Noah opens the door, and puts out his hand and pulls the wanderer into the ark. Or, best of all, and most intelligible and real to the believing heart, the testimony of the sweet singer of Israel in the fortieth Psalm: 'I waited patiently for the LORD—I did nothing but wait—and He inclined unto me, and heard my cry. He brought me up also out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay, and set my feet upon a rock, and established my goings. And He put a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and trust in the LORD.' On his part it is the waiting of utter abandonment; and the dark, despairing cry. He was sinking in the horrible pit of condemnation, and the miry clay of corruption. He was like Jeremiah while a prisoner in the bottle-necked dungeon. To deliver himself was an impossibility. His part was the waiting and crying; God's part was the working and saving.

2. Thus strength is *renewed or changed.* Exhausted and spent, you come to God, and wait. You are a very beggar. All your supplies have failed. Your resources have come to the very end. But as you wait, you discover that the end of your resources is only the beginning of God's. It is as if your clothes were worn and ragged and threadbare.

You have come to the end of their worth and serviceableness, and would gladly be done with them for ever. And so you come and wait, and God gives you a new supply, so that you may put off the old, and put on the new. Every morning you may come and wait at the fountain, and dip your pitcher into the flood, and carry it away full and running over. But it will all be needed for the burden and heat of the day. Long before night the little pitcher will be empty again, and you will be constrained to find your way back to wait and get the renewal of your great Divine supply. Nor need any one be afraid lest Christian life be thus made uncertain, and spasmodic, and intermittent—a thing of mere shreds and patches, and thrums and broken ends. Too often, alas, it is so! But it need not be. The waiting for fresh strength need not interfere with our using up the strength bestowed. We ought to learn the blessed secret of taking in and giving out at the same time —waiting for God and working for men. On the North-Western Railway, they now run the express trains from London to Crewe—a distance of over 150 miles—without stopping. An ingenious and rare contrivance makes this wonderful feat possible and comparatively easy. Midway on the journey long iron troughs, filled with water, are placed between the rails, and the engine-driver, without slackening speed, has only to drop a tube and take up a new supply, filling his exhausted water-tank again, so as to renew his strength, and enable him to reach his destination. The strain of modern life is sometimes almost unendurable. The true cure for care, and worry, and exhaustion, is to keep open the lines of communication with heaven. Daniel was able to

maintain his soul's spiritual life even in heathen Babylon, because he kept his window open in his chamber toward Jerusalem. And when trouble and danger threatened him, it made no difference, for he maintained his devotions, and renewed his strength by waiting on the Lord—'as he did aforetime.'

It is a blessed thing to be able, in any circumstances, and under the pressure of any great or sudden emergencies, to wait on God, and draw strength and inspiration for the need of the moment. Nehemiah standing and ministering as the cupbearer to a heathen king, prayed to the God of heaven, and momentous consequences came in answer to that prayer. But it is of the last importance that we appreciate at their true, high value, appointed times and seasons for waiting on, and strengthening our hands and hearts in God. Men and women who are living at high pressure all the week, had need to look well to it that they are making the most of the Sabbath, and the Sanctuary, and the outward and ordinary means of grace. We can ill afford to despise or neglect them. Our appreciation of these will be the index and the measure of the depth of our religious life; and our Christian character will grow brave and strong, only as it is nurtured and cherished in the atmosphere of devotion and Divine fellowship. 'Wait, I say, on the LORD.'

IV. STRENGTH EXERCISED. 'They shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint.' When we look casually at these words, we imagine that Isaiah must have made a mistake and begun at the wrong end. Our order would be to begin with walking and

go on to running, and finish up with flying. This looks more like onward, upward progress. Yet the prophet is right, and our first fancy is quite wrong. The three stages are stated in their natural and spiritual order; and they are linked and tied together so as to produce a great moral unity and harmony. There is to be found in this development the true spiritual evolution, which goes on to its full fruition and climax in the purification and perfection of our Christian manhood.

It is also important to keep in view at this point, that Divine strength is bestowed for use in connection with good, honest work. It is not intended that we use or abuse it as a mere luxury. It is nothing less than a crime, as certainly it is a blunder, to assume that life may be a sentimental dream, or a selfish indulgence. It is a school for moral training, and a battlefield for spiritual conflict and victory. So much remains to be done, and the time is so short, and the opportunity so great, that indolence and idleness are positively unpardonable, and sure to be visited with fearful retribution and shame. May God help us all to be strong indeed for duty and service and suffering—faithful unto death, and worthy of the crown of life at last!

1. There is strength *to fly*. Some of you may have been tempted at times to say—'O that we had the wings of a dove, that we might fly away and be at rest!' But God has refused your request. Yet He gives you something better over against it. Instead of the wings of a dove to fly away, He gives the wings of an eagle to fly upward—soaring while you sing. This exercise of Divine strength does not free us from the engagements and entanglements of common,

daily life; but, for the time, it lifts us high above them, and we enjoy happy spiritual freedom. 'Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house. They go from strength to strength; every one of them in Zion appeareth before God.' Many a time on God's day, and in His house, and at His table, spiritually-minded men and women have been lifted above themselves and brought into the sweet and holy fellowship of heaven. They have sat in the heavenly places with Christ. They have found for themselves the exalted felicities of the Delectable Mountains and the Land Beulah. The strong wings have even borne them to the top of Pisgah, where with Moses they have had a glimpse of that goodly land and Lebanon—a sweet foretaste of the rest that remaineth to the people of God. Such moments on the mount are exquisitely rare and rich. They are 'days of heaven upon earth.' This holy exercise of Divine strength and grace brings that other world very near, and makes us conscious that we belong to it, and it to us. And while the ecstatic and beatific vision lasts, this present evil world is far off and forgotten. 'Its joys grow dim, its glories pass away.' The Unseen and the Eternal have dawned upon the soul.

2. There is strength *to run*. When in the midst of the enjoyment of the high privilege of the Mount of Transfiguration, Peter was so fascinated and delighted that he wanted to make three tabernacles and stay there. He said—'Lord, it is good for us to be here—let us remain.' But it might not be. It served a good purpose while it lasted. But it was soon over. Both the Master and the disciples had hard and trying work waiting for them at the bottom of the hill. Raphael's great picture, so full of inspira-

tion and genius, gives us the two scenes over against one another. The glory at the top must give way to the claims of sorrow and suffering far below, and the one experience is intended to educate and inspire and strengthen them for the other. Even so, there is an intimate connection between mounting up as on eagles' wings, and running 'with patience the race set before us.' The high privilege of Sabbath is fitted and intended to strengthen for the holy duty and faithful service of Monday. If we run without wearying, while engaged in the needful and dutiful occupations of our week-day world, we shall commend our piety, and men shall take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus, and have seen His face 'in the holy mount.' The weakness of our religion nowadays is due to the fact that there is a wide breach between the sacred and the secular in our lives. We are supposed to be better men and women in the church, than in the world ; and are understood to lay aside the spirit of devotion with our hymn-books and our Sunday clothes. What we need, more than most things, just now, is the grace and strength that shall enable us, in the workshop, and the counting-house, and the drawing-room, and at the homeliest fireside, to run in the way of God's commandments, and bring the details of common life under law to Christ.

3. There is strength *to walk*. The flying gives place to running, and the running slows down into walking. The truest and severest test of discipleship is to be found here. We shall find it harder work to walk without fainting, than to fly high, or to run well. We shall need the iron shoes for the flinty roads. There are rough bits, and steep places, where we may hardly be able to keep our feet, and can only climb

on hands and knees. Here is God's High School for His chosen people. This is 'the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ.' 'Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.' Behold! the three children are cast bound into the burning fiery furnace, seven times heated; 'and lo,' says the king, 'I see four men loose, *walking* in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the form of the fourth is like a son of God.' Listen to another saint sweetly singing —'Yea, though I *walk* through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me.' And the crown and glory of the great tribulation comes at last when Christ Himself fulfils His promise to the faithful few who kept their garments clean, even in Sardis—'They shall *walk* with me in white, for they are worthy.'

V

THE PATIENCE OF GOD'S GRACE

'For thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel; In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength; and ye would not. But ye said, No; for we will flee upon horses; therefore shall ye flee: and, We will ride upon the swift; therefore shall they that pursue you be swift. One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one; at the rebuke of five shall ye flee: till ye be left as a beacon upon the top of a mountain, and as an ensign on an hill. And therefore will the LORD wait, that He may be gracious unto you, and therefore will He be exalted, that He may have mercy upon you: for the LORD is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for Him.'—ISAIAH xxx. 15-18.

IN the very heart of this wonderful Scripture passage there is to be found a full and true Gospel. It overflows, and floods us, as we linger over it, with evangelic truth and tenderness. Like some splendid jewel, richly set, and surrounded, it shines and sparkles in all its native brilliance and beauty. To a devout Hebrew heart, the national and outward impression of the case, as well as the ordinary discipline it implies, might have had an importance we can only very partially understand; while, perhaps, the inner and spiritual purpose intended, was more vaguely and dimly apprehended in consequence. But equally to them and to us, it traces, in minute and faithful detail, the history of the great spiritual struggle—a soul's sore conflict, and victory over

itself, and over the wild lawlessness, and desperate waywardness of a sinful and defiant human will. This very remarkable text is most instructive and suggestive, as a revelation of the beginning, and progressive stages, and final blessed termination of a struggle, which truly and faithfully marks, and at the same time permanently moulds, true Christian experience.

There is a great deal in this Gospel of Isaiah which has a claim to be very seriously pondered by ourselves. The blame will be our own, if we fail to derive from it richest spiritual teaching and comfort and warning. To the cold-hearted and the careless it comes like a great solemn voice from out of these heavens, seeking to arrest them in their wild career of madness. To the stout-hearted and rebellious—in whose experience the monster of self continues increasingly strong and fierce and terrible, it bids a very plain and calm, but very awful defiance. It gives a strange licence, and yet sets a determined limit, to the untamed and unbroken, sin-controlled human will. And at the close, it reveals the God of salvation—Jehovah, Israel's God—waiting, in His longlived patience and sovereign, saving grace—to welcome home again, and comfort with the very consolations of God, the tired and weary hearts that had exhausted the last remnants of their strength, in fighting against His grand and generous providential discipline; and in their blinded infatuation, refusing and rebelling against His Gospel and Himself. It may well be true that this very subject forms a memorable chapter in the religious experience of some of us to-day. Perhaps we are midway in this unhappy, unequal struggle—growing weary of the ceaseless, hopeless conflict. O

that the Blessed Spirit may send this as a word in season to them that are weary; and that they may discover, even now, that the Lord is indeed WAITING that He may be gracious unto them! and may be led in true faith and true penitence to say—as did backsliding Israel long ago—'Asshur shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses; neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods: for in Thee the fatherless findeth mercy.'

I. GOD'S WAY. 'For thus saith the Lord GOD, the Holy One of Israel: In returning and rest shall ye be saved; in quietness and in confidence shall be your strength.' There is a very striking contrast between the function of the modern preacher and that of the ancient prophet. In some respects the advantage is with us. We have clearer light and fuller revelation of Divine truth. The volume of inspiration is completed and closed for ever. Theology has been reduced to science and system. It is embodied in creeds and confessions. When we try to teach and preach the Word of God, we have behind us the beliefs and views that have been interpreted and ascertained and accepted by the ages. These findings are fitted to greatly help and sustain us in the shaping and formulating of our heavenly message. The matter is largely taken out of our hands. And yet, this very fact may militate against true freshness and freedom. It may sadly hamper and hinder the true prophetic instinct. Severe systematic statement of religious truth is apt to make it appear hard and cold. In these last days we are in danger of awakening a recoil from creed and dogma, lest we should seem to be fettered and enslaved thereby. It were

well if we had the heavenly skill to hold the balance even, so as to maintain firmly and intelligently 'the things most surely believed amongst us,' and at the same time assert and make room for the pathos and poetry and humanity and Christian sympathy by which alone we can gain the ears, and win the hearts of men for God.

The old prophet had this advantage over us at all events—he was not so greatly tempted as we are to discuss cold and lifeless theological abstractions. The living God was at his back. His message was warm and practical and personal. It had in it the genuine ring of sincerity and true human sympathy. It might have terrible implications of wrath and ruin, but in its bosom was ever found the Divine tenderness and forbearance. It was hard work for the prophet to be true to God in this. Jonah could not trust himself truly to represent God's tenderness to the men of Nineveh—it was so much greater than his own—and so he fled to Tarshish. But there is assured comfort in the fact that, in spite of all other differences, there are for the prophet and the preacher two abiding constant quantities—the heart of God and the heart of man. We occupy common ground here. Isaiah's Gospel and ours are identical. There can be none other. For it is Jehovah yearning over the sinner, and in a great outburst of Divine tenderness, doing His very utmost to save him, and win back his poor lost soul.

1. *The Way to Righteousness.* 'In returning and rest shall ye be saved.' The practical issue is plainly and unmistakably presented here. It is (1) *repentance* unto life. Through His prophet, Jehovah lays down both His Law and His Gospel. There is

a gracious promise associated with a stern demand. In the background an awful warning is implied. Here is indeed the first point of contact between the gospel and every sinner. Just here they agree, or quarrel with it. It is the crisis of the soul. Here the prodigal comes to himself and says, 'I will arise and go to my father.' Hear Isaiah enforcing this same glad message—'Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; and let him return unto the LORD, and He will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon.' And listen to the Psalmist giving a sweet and beautiful illustration of the sinner's response: 'I thought on my ways and turned my feet unto Thy testimonies. I made haste and delayed not to keep Thy commandments.' (2) It is *faith* in Jesus Christ. In returning and rest—these two soul-exercises are in reality one. On Israel's part there is the pitiful confession that they had sought it in vain, on God's part there is the promise that turning round, and resting in the Lord, will mean salvation for them. It might have for the Hebrew conscience a somewhat legal aspect at first, and might imply a resolution to return to the law and its claims of duty, and worship, and sacrifice. But this could only be a provisional resting-place, on the way to Christ—who is 'the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.'

2. *The Way to Strength.* 'In quietness and confidence shall be your strength.' Right does not always mean might. It is often altogether the other way. Still true strength must have right for its foundation. To be right with God—repenting and believing—returning and resting—forgiven and saved

and safe—this is the firm foundation on which a strong Christian life and character may be built up. This is the true theory of Christian believing and living. After you come to find your righteousness in God, there also will be found your true strength. But it involves a high and holy spiritual exercise. (1) *Quietness*. That means stillness, silence, meekness of soul. It is submission, surrender, sacrifice, self-renunciation. It assumes the giving up of the saved life into the Redeemer's keeping, and receiving it back again from Him with sweet contentment. It accepts with holy tenderness all His dealings and designs in carrying forward the education of the soul. It brings with it the entire absence of self-will, alongside of a beautiful and blessed manifestation of strength of will, and force of character, asserted all for Him. (2) *Confidence*. This gives moral muscle and sinew to the quietness. It braces and strengthens it, for it links the fortunes of the saved sinner with those of the God that saves him. All the future is provided for. It has been said that half the world is unable to enjoy to-day, because haunted with the guilty memories of yesterday; and the other half, because haunted with fears and anxieties about to-morrow. This miserable existence may come to an end at once and for ever. Isaiah's Gospel gives it its death-blow. In returning and resting, there is found God's great salvation, and the past is all forgiven. In quietness and confidence there comes to us, like an inspiration, the assurance that the future is all provided for and absolutely secure in Christ, and that as our day our strength shall be, 'For this God is our God for ever and ever: He will be our guide even unto death.'

II. MAN'S WAY. 'But ye said, No: for we will flee upon horses, and we will ride upon the swift.' Here we have a direct negative to the overture of Jehovah. It is the challenge of wilful and rebellious Israel. The two are in deliberate and daring antagonism. It is a fresh declaration of war—a determined resolve never to surrender. Man's way is an emphatic refusal to acquiesce in, and accept God's way of peace. Anew the standard of rebellion is raised aloft. It is the wicked assertion of self, renouncing all show of dependence on God, and having resource to other helpers and allies instead. God's Israel was commanded not to multiply horses, lest they might thus be tempted to lean on an arm of flesh; and in their best days they give implicit obedience to the Divine decree. But the spirit of declension betrayed itself in this very form, and we see them riding on the swift, and fleeing upon horses — courting for themselves ruin and destruction. This meant for them political and national disaster, as certainly as it betrayed their unbelief, and the deep hostility of their hearts against the laws and landmarks of God's grace.

If we come to take a spiritual view of this unhappy attitude towards God, we shall discover much in the transactions and developments associated with it, fitted to give us pause, that we may honestly learn and know 'the plague of our own hearts.'

1. Take a godless man. He frankly and fearlessly says NO, to God's great law and authority. He is aware of his dependence, and must have some arm on which to lean. Therefore he leagues himself with God's enemy, and dares to defy Him. He indulges in sin, and tries to eat forbidden fruit, without incurring

pains and penalties in doing so. He may as soon think of putting his hand into the fire without burning it. But only bitter experience will teach him this severe but salutary lesson. And so he plunges headlong, trying to get the good of life without acknowledging God or doing homage to His Law or His Gospel. O sad sight! to see this rebel race of men disowning God, in whom they live and move and have their being; and seeking to find in other things a substitute to staunch the awful hunger of their souls. The pleasures of sin, the love of money, the delirium of wealth, the lust of power or intellect or fashion, the god of this world and of this age—any or all of them, and many more beside—may be the swift horses on which graceless men ride and flee, as fast and far as they possibly can, armed with the weapons of their rebellion against Jehovah.

2. Take an awakened man. His first wild, mad ride has turned out a dismal failure. His sin has found him out, and recoiled with disastrous results upon himself. Bitter and dear-bought experience has taught him that the way of transgressors is hard, and that if a man break through a hedge, a serpent shall bite him. Yet though such an one may, by stress of circumstances, and through the Spirit's awakening work, be led to abandon sin; it may be only the more desperately to cling to the filthy rags of his own self-righteousness. He may turn, in his untamed wilfulness and perverse obstinacy, from his badness to his goodness. The Jew—of whom Paul so pathetically speaks—going about to establish his own righteousness, is certainly mounted upon a hot and fiery steed. He is a rebel still in his heart. He is in a sinking bog. He leaps from one seem-

ingly solid patch to another, but each one gives way beneath him. What a protracted and painful struggle this often comes to be, simply in consequence of the resolute determination not to *submit* to the righteousness of God. Sometimes men of the world, and especially women, when they have had their fling, and have exhausted the pleasures of sin, which are but for a season, have had to confess that they have been cheated, and disappointed, and defeated. Such may turn to penances, and prayers, and pious exercises, and the miserable drudgery of religious forms,—the very worst spirit of morbid and fictitious self-surrender that courts the cloister and the nunnery. It is a vain apology for the absence of true devotion. It is only a new development of the rebellious will. Israel is still riding and fleeing on horses. There is no true surrender—no real submission. It is the spirit of proud defiance after all.

3. Take even a good man. He has yielded, and given up his sin; he has made the great renunciation of his own goodness, and come to close with Christ and take up his cross and follow Him. He frankly submits and surrenders—or at least he imagines he does so. But he does not know or understand himself. There is an iron will that must bend or break. Over losses and crosses and multiplied emptyings from vessel to vessel, the sad discovery is made, that even God's own are bent on backsliding. Jeremiah records for us all a very gracious and comforting word of God—'I have surely heard Ephraim bemoaning himself thus: Thou hast chastised me and I was chastised, as a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke: turn Thou me, and I shall be turned: for Thou art the LORD my God.' How often there is

betrayed, in some weak moment, the terrible recoil of a strong will and proud self, when it had been too soon, and too easily taken for granted that it was crucified with Christ, and dead, and buried, and gone for ever! Many of us are but dull and backward learners in the school of Christ; and multitudes of true-hearted men and women—with spiritual longings and saintly aspirations, have to mourn, with breaking hearts and blistering tears, their all but insuperable tendency to ride and flee upon horses—challenging God's way, and seeking with earnest endeavour to get their own. It is a sublime and blessed attainment, but hard to reach, even when we try to follow the great Master's leading, to be able and willing, honestly and without reserve to say—'Thy will, not mine, be done.'

III. MAN'S DEFEAT. 'Therefore shall ye flee: therefore shall they that pursue you be swift. One thousand shall flee at the rebuke of one; at the rebuke of five shall ye flee: till ye be left as a beacon on the top of a mountain, and as an ensign on an hill.' This woful picture is true to nature, and life, and experience. There is no extravagance or exaggeration in it. God says—'Ephraim is joined to his idols, let him alone.' 'They are bent on a career of riding and fleeing from Me. Let them ride. Let them flee. Give rein to the horses. They shall soon exhaust and reduce their ill-used strength. In a while their choice shall turn into their necessity.' The runaway sinner soon comes to learn the limitations of his boasted freedom and independence. Soon he finds his way hedged up with thorns, so that he cannot find his path. There are no truer or more

terrible words in all the Book of God than these—'Thine own wickedness shall correct thee, and thy backslidings shall reprove thee: know therefore and see that it is an evil thing and bitter, that thou hast forsaken the LORD thy God, and that My fear is not in thee, saith the Lord GOD of Hosts.' Thus bloody Manasseh, in the old days, giving rein to lawless lusts and vilest passions, made his name a byword in history for excess in every form of wickedness. Notwithstanding his pious training, and the godly influence and example of Hezekiah his father, 'he did evil in the sight of the LORD, like unto the abominations of the heathen.' He made Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to err, and to do worse than the heathen. He was a murderer, and filled Jerusalem with innocent blood. He stands out as a human monster without one redeeming feature in his character. His name is a symbol of utter godlessness and villainy. It seems as if he were a castaway. And yet even this poor devil's castaway was circumvented and defeated. The Lord spake to him and his people in vain. Then he made use of 'the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh among the thorns, and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon. And when he was in affliction, he besought the LORD his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers, and prayed unto Him; and He was entreated of him and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that the LORD He was God.' The thorns, and the fetters, and the horrors of captivity in a foreign dungeon, brought this proud, lawless, blood-stained autocrat to his senses, and to his knees, and to his

God. He was compelled to hoist the white flag of capitulation, and acknowledge himself defeated. Verily the name and memory of Manasseh is left for the Church and the world in all succeeding generations, 'as a beacon on the top of a mountain, and for an ensign on an hill.'

But however deeply a monument of sovereign mercy like Manasseh—a brand plucked out of the fire—may impress us; that is, if possible, a greater miracle of Divine grace still, which takes in hand a man well connected and with character, and credit, and respectability, and the white flower of a blameless life—all at his back, and standing out conspicuously in his commendation—and compels him utterly and absolutely and for ever, to renounce and disown it all, before both God and man. You put a very terrible strain on a moral, honourable, upright man, when you tell him it must all go for nothing, and that he must have no confidence in the flesh. Once upon a time Paul was full of this confidence. It hedged him round and protected him like a triple fortress. He could make his boast of it and say—'If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more; circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee; concerning zeal, persecuting the church; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.' No wonder if the apostle made much of this great heritage and possession. He clung to it most tenaciously and desperately. It came between him and God. Paul had, or fancied he had, righteousness of his own, and it was a severe and protracted struggle, before he was constrained to submit to the righteous-

ness of God, and renounce his own. He had an honourable record as a citizen, and a churchman, and a scholar. Thus we see him riding, and fleeing, and fighting against God, when all the time he thought to do Him service. Only when Christ met him, and challenged him as a persecutor of Himself, did that high-souled, heroic man surrender. The conviction and conceit of half a lifetime were shivered into fragments, as in a moment. There and then he broke with the past completely, and began to reconstruct his new life on the ruins of the old. On that road to Damascus, though no memorial marks the spot, the apostle of the Gentiles was defeated, and his righteous self was slain; and to all Gospel times he is left as another 'beacon on the top of a mountain, and for an ensign on an hill.'

But this surrender must needs take effect all along the line of a redeemed man's life. Stage after stage must the stiff, and stern, human will give way, and one line of defence after another be given up. It is the real measure and guarantee of redemption work. The severity of the struggle is sometimes misunderstood, and made occasion for grudge, and grumble, and discontent. But if God's Kingdom is to come, the rebellious provinces of our being must be subdued and completely won for the King. Reference has already been made to Jonah—God's runaway prophet. He went west, when he was asked to go east. But he was held in by the bit and bridle of Jehovah. And in the end, by a very strange and entangled process, in spite of his petulance, and irritation, and jealousy for the Divine consistency, he has to give in, and do the work and will of Heaven, which he had challenged and tried hard to evade. We may assume

the record of it is his own; and, if so, he tells the story against himself with exquisite grace, and penitential self-renunciation—an example we may all fitly and safely follow. Affliction and sorrow, too, have often a mission of a very thankless and unwelcome nature. Good men and women often discover the corruption that remains within them, only when some trouble or misfortune suddenly and unexpectedly overtakes them. Then they find themselves in real rebellion. The late Dr. Foote tells of a woman who lost her two children, one after another. She was inconsolable. Her motherhood was torn, and wounded, and bleeding, and she deliberately charged God with cruelty. But she thought she found a kind of grim satisfaction, when she said, 'He has done His worst; it is impossible for Him to do me further wrong.' Only a few weeks elapsed, however, when by accident, in a moment, her husband was killed. With great anxiety and misgiving her minister went to sympathise with and console her. He remembered her attitude of rebellion, and how she had spoken unadvisedly with her lips—limiting the Holy One of Israel. But what was his surprise and joy to find that in the interval her spirit had been graciously subdued and sweetly exercised, and all she had to say was this: 'The LORD gave, and the LORD hath taken away, blessed be the name of the LORD!' 'Oh, if you only knew,' writes Madame Guyon, 'the blessedness of an *accepted* sorrow!' I confess the description of the hunted, chased, conquered rebels is awfully suggestive of bare, desolate, lonely lives, 'bereft of every stay but heaven.' Yet is it a Divine and gracious discipline, and defeat in reality means blessed victory.

IV. GOD'S VICTORY. 'And therefore will the LORD wait that He may be gracious unto you, and therefore will He be exalted, that He may have mercy upon you; for the LORD is a God of judgment: blessed are all they that wait for Him.' God is here represented in a singularly dignified and fascinating attitude. He calmly and patiently waits. He can afford to wait. He never is in a hurry. 'I will go and return to my place till they acknowledge their offence, and seek my face. In their affliction they will seek Me early.' Out of sight, but not far away, He waits and watches the outcome of the struggle. The vain and impotent rage and fury are soon exhausted and spent. 'He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh, the LORD shall have them in derision.' The key to true parental authority and control is the mastery of the child's will. It is a delicate and difficult discipline—as much so for the parent as for the child. It means the assertion of the stronger and wiser will of the two. Wisdom is often in great demand in the exercise of this patient waiting. For what we are to our children, our God and Father is to us. It is the sublime victory of God's patient waiting, when we come, it may be after many days, to bow in quiet and sweet submission, before the Great Divine Imperative—'My soul is even as a weaned child.'

But He waits to be gracious. After the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand, an attempt was made to take Christ and make Him a King. The disciples must have been mixed up with the project, and so they were sent away across the sea without their Master. While they are tossed and tempest-driven, and face to face with destruction, He has gone up into a mountain to pray. That was an

awful night's experience for them. They were in deep disgrace. They had misunderstood their Lord, and deeply wounded Him; and now they are deserted and desolate of heart. 'A hidden face strikes deeper than an angry blow.' Yet all the while He is praying for them, and watching and waiting to be gracious; and at the fourth watch of the night—when their carnal conceit and will-worship has been eliminated, while in their dire distress they mourned an absent Lord, and longed for His coming—lo! He appears, walking on the billows, and commanding the winds and waves, which had been schoolmaster and monitor in His absence, and preparing them for His gracious and glorious coming. Then the most rebellious and self-willed among them all are taught by a humbling experience, after this to acknowledge His supreme sovereignty and authority, and exalt Him very high, that He may be the Lord God, merciful and gracious.

On a famous European battlefield, the commander-in-chief was detained elsewhere till late in the day. In his absence the fortunes of war had gone against his brave warriors, and they were beginning to yield in despair. When he arrived on the scene and took over the command, he held out his watch, and, looking towards the sinking afternoon sun, confidently said—'There is still time enough left to win the day.' In a moment his high hopefulness communicated itself to his wavering army, inspiring and beckoning them on to victory. And so that seemingly lost battle was won. So, too, with us in this Christian warfare. The great Captain of our salvation keeps out of it till we are stricken and broken-down, and at our wits'-end. He waits to

be gracious. But he is a God of judgment and discretion. He acts on high and holy principle. He is never animated by caprice, or the mere impulse of the moment. He knows best how long to wait, and how soon to come. Martha said—'Lord, if Thou hadst been here!'—'but it is too late now!' What a blunder she made! Poor, blighted, withered, ship-wrecked, broken sinner, conscious only of failure, and defeat, and disgrace—put yourself into God's charge. There is time to win this half-lost battle after all. 'For,' in truth, 'the battle is not your's, but God's.' He is waiting to be gracious. 'Blessed are all they that wait for Him.'

'For the love of God is broader
Than the measures of man's mind,
And the heart of the Eternal
Is most wonderfully kind.'

VI

GOD'S EVANGELICAL COVENANT

'And I will establish my covenant with thee; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD: that thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord GOD.' —EZEKIEL xvi. 62, 63.

THE prophet Ezekiel, as he sits among the captives by the river of Chebar, has a very delicate and difficult function to discharge. He is in the position of a skilful surgeon, in the exercise of his professional duty, brought face to face with a mass of disease certainly dangerous to life and limb. If he can ever hope to grapple with the case successfully and save the patient's life, he must act firmly and resolutely, regardless of his own feelings as well as those of the sufferer he would befriend. He must make use of his sharp knife, and cut deep into the quivering flesh. He must reach and lay bare, and bring out into the light of day, the hidden roots and secret lurking-places of the fell disease. To expose it is to kill it. The vile humours on which it has been fed and nourished will only thus be drained away and dried up; and health and strength be restored to the victim of pain and suffering. This is the strange kind of work the prophet has in hand, if he would help and

deliver these Hebrew captives, hanging their harps on the willows, and weeping by the rivers of Babylon. His prophetic mission is to lay bare before them the plague of their own hearts, and show the intimate and sure connection between their sinful backsliding and apostasy, and the sore sufferings of the exile. This was a painful process for both parties, and called for great plainness of speech. He does not mince his words so as to suit fine feelings and ears polite. When they mourn and weep, and complain with bitterness of the cruelty of their captivity, he has to tell them frankly and unreservedly that it is the bitter fruit of their evil ways, and that they had brought it on themselves. In Jehovah's name, Ezekiel formulates the charge against Israel, in terrible, unspeakable detail. It is that He had chosen a poor outcast orphan, born and bred in filth and wretchedness; that He had rescued her, and made her comely and renowned with His adornments; that in His sovereign grace she was chosen and called to be His mystic bride; but that she had proved false and faithless to the most sacred bond, and was branded as a shameless adulteress—conforming to the idolatries and pagan rites of the heathen world.

But the marvel of this matchless story is this—When the long, black catalogue of sin and crime is exhausted, and the piled up agony of the situation implies a foreboding of judgment and doom fearful to contemplate: then the still, small voice of grace and mercy strikes in, and makes itself heard. Away back in those old Hebrew times, and among the sorrow-laden exiles, is mercy found rejoicing against judgment. Even then, where sin abounded, grace did much more abound. God is already beginning to turn again the

captivity of Zion. He begins graciously to remember His covenant, and His rebellious people begin to remember their sins. Ezekiel was after all a genuine Gospel preacher. He was in the true Evangelical Succession. And he wisely laid the foundation in a severe and searching law-work. It might be well for us in these last days to follow in the footsteps of one who learned to balance so faithfully the relations of sin and grace: and who—under the teaching and inspiration of the Blessed Spirit—was enabled to present his Gospel-message in such a way as to lend to it positive charm and fascination, while he magnified and glorified the covenant grace of God in saving the sinner, and at the same time made his sin become to him exceeding sinful and shameful.

We have here to contemplate God establishing His covenant with His people—in knowledge, and peace, and penitence.

I. The Covenant Established. 'I will establish my covenant with thee.' The old-fashioned theology of the covenants has somehow got to be out of date. Our forefathers in Scotland took a firm grip of the covenants, and the covenants took a grip of them. Thomas Carlyle, with his wonted shrewdness and sagacity, gives John Knox a high place among his heroes, and vindicates the hero-worship that is ascribed to him. And with good reason. For Knox was a kind of prophet and priest and Christian patriot all in one. His ambition was to make Scotland all that Israel might have been. It may have been 'a devout imagination,' but it possessed and thrilled his noble and heroic soul. He wished to 'take over' Jehovah and His covenant relation to the Jewish nation. He

devoutly dreamed and toiled in the hope of making us a covenanted people, and setting up in its reality the great Old Testament Theocracy. He was in a sense a true successor of Ezekiel, and appropriated his attitude towards both God and the people. And who will venture to say his mission was a failure, or his life-work unfruitful? The difficulties in his way were tremendous. He was misunderstood and misrepresented on every side. But he succeeded in shaking off the yoke of Rome, and set his nation free. And it is true of him, as John Wesley said—'God buries His workmen, but carries on their work.' For after many days the fruit of seed sown by him made its strange appearance in the men of the moss-hags and the hill-sides, whose banner and war-cry were—'FOR CHRIST'S CROWN AND COVENANT.' The covenanters have been represented as narrow and intolerant, superstitious and unreasonable, but it was the outcome of strange times and circumstances, even if it were in measure true; and yet they contended earnestly and manfully for the faith, so as to make this dear land of ours Christian, and Protestant, and Free. They struggled hard to make ours a consecrated and covenanted nation—the sacramental army of heaven. In our day and generation we have drifted far enough away from this grand Old Testament conception of the national religious life. Who can tell but that in the stress and struggle of modern unbelief and indifference we may be driven to fall back upon this Covenant God so dear to our Church and country? It would be a day of wonderful grace and mercy for Scotland, if only Jehovah were to come and say, as He did to Israel—'I will establish My covenant with thee.'

But in truth any really national idea of the covenant can only grow out of the *personal*. The charm of Divine grace and redemption-work is the appeal it makes to, and the response it gets from, individual human hearts. And it is a *covenant* salvation. The sinner who can spell out for himself the great Divine word, and in broken and faltering accents lisp its deep meaning, has mastered the profound secret God hides from the wise and prudent, but reveals unto babes. For it is in virtue of a covenant that we have been ruined, and it is by another and a better covenant that we are restored. The broken covenant of works, made between God and our first father Adam, has involved the human family in its awful consequences. Some people think it a hard and cruel and unjust arrangement. Yet the fact remains. Adam stood for us, and represented us in that old bargain with God. Had he kept it, it would have been for us, as well as for himself; and so too, his failure was ours as well as his own. Out of that broken covenant has been bequeathed to us a terrible entail. It has tainted the race, body and soul, and left humanity a physical and moral and spiritual ruin. But our hope grows out of our dark despair. God the Father has made a new covenant with His well-beloved Son—'the second Adam, the Lord from heaven.' This bargain had a firmer, securer basis, for David sings of it as 'an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure.' Here Christ Himself stands for us—our great Surety and Representative. In His person, and word, and work, and obedience unto death, we have gloriously made manifest the vindication of the Eternal Righteousness. He has borne the penalty of sin. He has kept the law. And

so all who are represented in His covenant engagement have their guilt transferred legally to Him, and His righteousness imputed legally to them. This great doctrine of the covenants lies in the very heart and soul of our evangelical theology; and it would give point and power to gospel preaching, and provide a safe and sure resting-place for many weary and heavy-laden hearts, over-loaded with the conscious burden of sin and guilt, if it were clearly enunciated, and intelligently understood and accepted. It is simply the gospel of Divine suretyship and substitution, which, under the awakening and enlightenment of the Holy Ghost, brings rest to the guilty conscience and peace to the troubled heart.

And all this takes effect, when God '*establishes*' His covenant with the sinner. This happens in every case in which 'the Spirit applieth to us the redemption purchased by Christ, by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling.' It simply means the due appreciation and cordial appropriation of the gift of Jesus Christ, presented and freely offered in His official covenant-relation to His people. The guilty and self-condemned sinner who takes his stand on this ground is on the solid rock—the Rock of Ages. The men whom we call covenanters began with this. God first established His covenant with them; and then, on the ground of it, and on the strength of it, they drew up and sealed and signed, with their blood sometimes, the memorable and historical *Solemn League and Covenant*—intended to be the expression and symbol of the consecration of the covenant-redeemed Scottish Church and nation. What a magnificent and glorious message is brought to lost men, then, in this great

market-day of sovereign and free grace! 'For, to sum up all,' says Dr. Candlish, 'in the words of an old writer—Take hold of this blessed assurance, "that there is mercy enough in God, and merit enough in Christ, and power enough in the Spirit, and scope enough in the promises, and room enough in heaven," O sinner, for thee!'[1]

II. The Knowledge the Covenant brings with it. 'And thou shalt know that I am Jehovah.' These Hebrews had many very strange and painfully difficult lessons to learn in God's school. Their education, and emancipation from natural ignorance and blindness, was a severe and expensive process. They came to know Israel's God in the discipline of punishment. Yet it was a kind of knowledge that awakened fear, and distrust, and hate. They were in His mighty hand, and at the mercy of His sovereign power. It was only as the criminal in his bolted cell knows Queen Victoria, by finding himself under the iron grip of the relentless majesty of law; or as the pauper in his workhouse, with his legal dole of bread and water—only enough to keep the wolf from the door, and hardly that sometimes; or the child getting its education from the state, forced and free, fulfilling the ideal of that venerable statesman who boasted that the noblest provision of the statute-book was against destitution; and he argued that if the law said—'No man shall be destitute, it should also say—No man shall be ignorant.' Even so, whether in the old time or the new, in Jewish or Gentile dispensation—equally and all the same—the mere providential and legal and judicial and economic relationship to

[1] *The Atonement*, p. 396.

God is such, that under its dim light and teaching we only 'know Him afar off.' So much is this the case that the Lord Himself here says, that Israel shall know Him in a new character and by a new name altogether, when the covenant is established with Him. It is as if all they had learnt and known hitherto were shallow and superficial and at second-hand, and unworthy the name. 'O righteous Father, the world hath not known thee!'

This new knowledge is a Divine revelation. It comes by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost. Jehovah is manifested in His new and gracious character. All His severe discipline now assumes a new meaning, and is to be interpreted on a new principle. He becomes exceedingly great and glorious. He appears to us—as He proclaimed Himself to Moses—'The LORD, the LORD God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, and that will by no means clear *the guilty*; visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children, and upon the children's children, unto the third and fourth generation.' In the day when the fire came down, in answer to Elijah's prayer, and consumed the burnt-sacrifice, 'all the people saw it and fell on their faces and said, The LORD, He is the God.' Manasseh too, taken among the thorns, and carried to Babylon, was led to humble himself before God. When his prayer was answered, and his kingdom restored—'Then Manasseh knew that the LORD, He was God.' So long as men are living in ignorance, and worshipping an unknown God, they can criticise and quarrel with Him. They can limit Him, and complain that His ways are not equal. They can find fault

with His Law and Gospel, and sit in judgment on His word and will—His very character and Godhead. But oh, what a marvellous and gracious transformation is wrought in a human heart when the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ shines forth in all its effulgence and splendour! It immediately turns the night of the soul into noonday. All the harsh and false and distorted misconceptions of the character and heart and will of God vanish with darkness. The Light of the world reveals to us Jehovah invested in all the array of His glorious attributes and perfections. There is nothing now to challenge, or complain about, or be afraid of. No grudge has now room in the heart that has come to know God—as to His great and absolute power, or His inflexible justice, or His royal right to be supreme and sovereign. All we know awakens veneration and adoring wonder. He whom we feared as an enemy determined to crush us, is now revealed as our Deliverer and Benefactor—'the Friend that sticketh closer than a brother.' For He has established with us His covenant of grace, and now we know that He is the LORD. 'Mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other.' 'God is love'; and 'grace reigns through righteousness unto life eternal.'

III. THE PEACE THE COVENANT BRINGS WITH IT. 'When I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done.'

This implies a change in the Divine disposition toward Israel. There must have been wrong and outrage that had made God angry. He is angry with the wicked every day. And there must have

been some wonderful transaction that wrought the change. It needs to be fully explained and vindicated. Isaiah preached a gospel like this when he said—'Comfort ye, comfort ye, my people, saith your God. Speak ye to the heart of Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, her iniquity is pardoned; for she hath received of the LORD'S hand double for all her sins.' The comfort here enjoined is explained and justified and commended, inasmuch as it is of a kind to satisfy both the reason and the conscience. The comfort is grounded on peace, and the peace on pardon, and the pardon on payment. It is in reality a legal and judicial business. The pardon has been doubly earned, and the account fully met and legally discharged. A double curse was meted out to the surety and representative of this better covenant. But the majesty of the Divine Law was so highly magnified and made honourable, that it was counted double payment for all the sins of Jerusalem; and if there were such ample latitude and longitude in the fulfilment of the terms of the covenant-engagement on the part of the Kinsman-Redeemer, it will mean that the redemption so generously and handsomely and at such an awful price, purchased and provided, is, in consequence, invested with double value and security for them. Some men try to depreciate this view of the covenant of redemption. They say it represents God as cold, and calculating, and mercenary. But so is the human conscience as well. And if we are to preach to sinners the gospel of Divine forgiveness, it must commend itself to the stricken and guilty conscience, and be proclaimed on terms and conditions that God can give and man can

take. Conviction of sin is one great mission of the Comforter. It humbles the stout-hearted and far from righteousness. The revelation of sin—his own sin—is a memorable epoch in the religious history of any man. After the spiritual change which caused an entire revolution in the views and feelings of that great man, Thomas Chalmers, his preaching came immediately to possess a new power and impressiveness. With all the moral earnestness of his nature, as well as his marvellous eloquence, he had hardly been able to keep the farmers and ploughmen in his country parish of Kilmany awake under his sermons. But the spiritual change in him soon began to tell powerfully on them. At the church-door, one day, a young man, Alexander Paterson by name, said to his friend, William Eadie—'Did you feel anything strange in the church to-day?' To which he replied—'I never felt that I was a lost sinner till to-day.' 'Strange,' said the other, 'but it was the very same with me.' They walked along the road till they came to a wood, and there kneeling by a tree, they owned their guilt, and sought and found the Saviour, and gave their lives away to God. The very spot became hallowed. Men and women who knew the youths, and marked the change that had overtaken them, went in reverence and awe to look at the place, which was fitly called 'the trysting tree.' Both these men followed on to know the Lord, and faithfully and well served their generation; and the beginning of it all was the revelation of the Spirit—*first*, as to their sin and sinfulness; and *second*, as to the Divine forgiveness and satisfaction.

And the blessed assurance is given that the forgiven sin is covered up and blotted out. The word here

used to set forth pardon and peace, is one that properly signifies to *cover over* a thing with that which clings to it and hides it for ever from view. The same word occurs in the order as to the building of the ark. 'Thou shalt pitch it, or cover it, within and without, with pitch.' Oh, it is a great, gladdening fact this! Forgiven sin is covered over and hidden away from the searching eye of Jehovah. 'Thine iniquity is searched for and cannot be found.' 'I have blotted out, as a thick cloud, thy transgressions, and as a cloud thy sins; return unto Me: for I have redeemed thee.' A big, dark, dense cloud hangs threatening against the sky. You watch it with fear and trembling. It is fateful, and foreboding of coming storm. But the wind blows and the sun shines, and gradually its massive thickness is broken up, and chased along the sky-line, and in a little while it is absorbed and dissipated, and has ceased to be. It is blotted out. Thus comfortingly does the sinner's Covenant God commend the depth and height and length and breadth of His thoroughgoing forgiveness. 'For as the heaven is high above the earth, so great is His mercy toward them that fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us.' Your sin was laid on Christ, believer, and He bore the awful load. He appeared once in the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself. And now God is pacified toward thee. Your sin is cast behind His back, buried in the depths of the sea—forgiven and for ever forgotten—blotted out of His book and memory and heart for evermore. 'And in that day thou shalt say, O LORD, I will praise Thee; though Thou wast angry with me, Thine anger is turned away, and Thou comfortest me.'

But we must needs safeguard the situation here, and warn believers against a possible misconception. You are not for a moment to imagine God treats the matter of your sin lightly. If God is indeed pacified toward you, it is not because He is easy-going and good-natured and indifferent regarding the evil of your iniquities and sins. You have been forgiven much—O how much! Men will not believe you when you try to tell them the greatness of your sin, and the villainy of your evil heart of unbelief. They accuse you of morbid exaggeration. Your closest friend does not know you, and you do not know yourself, as your Covenant God does! It is impossible to exaggerate here. A great mistake is sometimes made in dealing with anxious, sin-burdened souls, in seeking to depreciate their sense of sin, and minimise their convictions of guilt and ill-desert. All the time we may be trying to undo the work of the Spirit, and to blunt the keen edge of the true penitential heart. Be sure of this, O awakened sinner! in all your overwhelming and humbling confessions of sin either to God or to man, the half hath not been told. But you do not need to tell Him. Great as your guilt may be in your own estimation, it is greater by far in His. And yet—oh, how wonderful it is! sounding like music in our ears—when even He says—'I am pacified toward thee for *all* that thou hast done'—'I know all thy sin, O believing soul; and I know all My Son endured on the cross that it might be put for ever out of the way.' 'Go in peace; thy sins, which are many, are all forgiven thee.'

'I marvel night and day, and cannot cease—
Ask evermore—"Can this thing be?"
Heaven brought to earth—her Maker made my peace,
And my God bound—to set me free!'

IV. The Penitence the Covenant brings with it. 'That thou mayest remember and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame.'

The perversity of human nature always seeks to invert the order of things here—making the penitence the condition of the pardon. What weary and bitter hours have come to seeking souls, because they would put at the beginning what God has placed at the end! As if they must first break their hard hearts, and then come to Him to reward them for their brokenness! These sweet and blessed exercises of penitential tenderness are the fruits rather than the roots of evangelical Christian life. Come with a cold, hard, proud, unfeeling heart, and take hold of the covenant and its gracious provisions, and, without an effort on your part, or a struggle, faith in Jesus Christ will bring into holy activity the grace of repentance unto life.

1. '*That thou mayest remember.*' The connection is very startling and suggestive. God begins to remember His covenant, and His people begin to remember their sins. Thus true repentance awakens thoughtfulness. The life of man is merely thoughtlessness and forgetfulness. And yet the actions and events of our life are only folded up and stowed away. They are within reach and call. They form fitting material for genuine penitence. O what a treasure-house is memory—for weal, or for woe! It may truly be one of the Judgment Books that are one day to be opened, and conscience another. It was to his shame that for two long years the chief butler remembered not Joseph but forgat him, after all his kindness; yet it was to his credit that he confessed his

fault when he remembered it, and that he did his best to make amends. 'I thought upon my ways, and turned my feet unto Thy testimonies.' Recollection—in its literal meaning—is a man gathering himself together and jointing all the broken and lost threads of his life. Often it is a hard and unwelcome task. But it may also be the first-fruit of gracious, spiritual, evangelical discipline—'That thou mayest remember.'

2. '*And be confounded.*' Confusion is the humiliating experience of awakening as from a life-long dream. It has all been a mistake—life and conduct have proceeded on utterly false principles. The light lets me see that I have acted the fool. And it is the remembrance of my sin that confounds me. 'Yea, it seems to import the heart's being struck with astonishment at its own sinfulness, and with amazement at its own madness; like a man plunged into the deep, his senses are utterly confounded.' It brings home the conviction of our being 'less than nothing and vanity,' when grace begins its work at the very roots of life, and, speaking peace, constrains us to remember and be confounded.

3. '*Because of thy shame.*' 'O Lord, unto us belongeth shame and confusion of face!' Sin means shame to the sinner sooner or later. Some men glory in their shame. But the token of conscious guilt, and true sense of sin, is shame. It carries with it the awful feeling of the nakedness and exposure of the sin-stained soul. And the shame grows upon the penitent when he sees how he has played the fool and been as a beast before God, and little short of a devil; and when he knows that all this has brought shame and ignominy to the Son of God. For my

sake, and on account of my sin, my blessed Redeemer endured the cross and despised the shame. And now when at this great price I have been forgiven, I cannot, for very shame, forgive myself.

4. '*And never open thy mouth any more.*' This single clause might be the fit subject for a whole sermon. For when grace opens the sinner's heart, it at the same time shuts his mouth. He has not a word to say for himself, or against his God. All his conceits and grudges and quarrels, and reflections against circumstances and environment and society and providence and fate and heaven, are quietly withdrawn and cancelled for ever. He condemns only himself. His virtue and morality and goodness are sought for and cannot be found. His prayer is that of the publican—'God be merciful to me the sinner.' And now his theology comes to have a new tone and character. Divine sovereignty is supreme. The will of God is rule and law and directory for his redeemed life. 'I was dumb, I opened not my mouth, because Thou didst it.' This meets every trouble. It is the blessed solution of all life's mysteries and difficulties. For it saves the sinner in such a gracious way as to humble and silence him into holy acquiescence and contentment, while it, at the same time, highly exalts the Covenant Redeemer, and sets Him on His throne.

'Rest, weary soul :
The Penalty is borne, the Ransom paid.
For all thy sins full satisfaction made ;
Strive not thyself to do what Christ hath done :
Take the free gift, and make the joy thine own ;
No more with pangs of guilt and fear distrest—
Rest, sweetly rest.'

VII

THE SPHERE FOR HUMAN ENDEAVOUR

'And he said, Thus saith the LORD, Make this valley full of ditches. For thus saith the LORD, Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, that ye may drink, both ye, and your cattle and your beasts. And this is but a light thing in the sight of the LORD: He will deliver the Moabites also into your hand.'—2 KINGS iii. 16-18.

WHATEVER may have been the merits of the quarrel between Jehoram, king of Israel, and Mesha, king of Moab, it was certainly a misfortune and a blunder that Judah should have joined the partnership of Israel and Edom, to avenge it. It was, unquestionably, an unholy alliance. No good could come of it. The risk was very great that it should involve all concerned—and specially Jehoshaphat and his people—in disaster and ruin. No doubt the wicked Jehoram flattered himself that with Judah on his one side, and Edom on his other, he should accomplish his purpose and prove invincible. But he had reckoned without his host, and forgotten to acknowledge the God of battles. When the three armies marched forth by the way through the wilderness of Edom, they calculated that Moab was already in their power and at their mercy. But they were confronted with an enemy they had not thought of, or prepared for,

who speedily laid them low. How vain and silly and short-lived is the pride and pomp of man when God takes in hand to conquer and lay him in the dust! We depend on Him for bread and water and every blessed thing, and He has only to withhold His bountiful supply for a little while in order to starve us into submission. A seven days' march in the way through the wilderness brought them face to face with death.

When men get into trouble and difficulty—even if it is due to their own folly and perversity—they begin to think and speak about God. Even Jehoram, the wicked son of Ahab and Jezebel, began to utter a pious whining commonplace, as if God must get credit for bringing three kings together to destroy them. It was mean. They had brought it on themselves; and yet this godless king dares to put the blame on God and providence. Jehoshaphat has more sense. He is in bad company; but he gives good counsel. He asks for a prophet, that he may inquire of the Lord by him. It is rather late in the day to begin. And yet we cannot afford to cast a stone at him, for we have all been often enough in the same condemnation. 'In their affliction they will seek me early.'

Sometimes good men suffer and are sorely punished when they get into bad company. On the other hand, bad men are often benefited for the sake of good men, with whom it is their fortune to be in any way associated. It was the saving of the kings of Israel and Edom that day, that they had with them the king of Judah. No doubt it was for his sake that Elisha had followed in the wake of this sadly broken-down allied army. He must have been

comparatively new to the prophetic work. Perhaps this was his first great public function. His attitude is dignified and firm. It is wonderful homage to Jehovah, that three kings, in their sore distress, should find their way to his door, and supplicate his intervention. He frowns on Jehoram with withering sarcasm and merciless scorn. He regards him only as a cringing coward; and, but for the presence of Jehoshaphat, would have refused to own or acknowledge him in his deep humiliation. It must have been gall and wormwood to his poor, proud nature; and yet he was so much at the mercy of Elisha, and felt so guilty, that he could only be silent. But the very contact with such a man excited and perturbed his spirit, and ruffled the holy calm of his prophetic soul, and he needed a minstrel to sing some old Hebrew melody before he could trust himself to speak this mystic message—'Make this valley full of ditches. For thus saith the Lord, Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water.'

We shall try to think of this historic situation as it applies to ourselves, in view of the state of the Church and the world to-day.

I. No Water. Water is perhaps the first and greatest necessity in the natural world. It means all the difference between the waste howling wilderness and the very garden of the Lord. If there be no water there can be no life; but if the river of the water of life is full to overflow, 'There shall be an handful of corn in the earth on the tops of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon, and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the

earth.' There are not many among us whose memory can go back to the year 1826. But we have heard with our ears, and our fathers have told us, how memorable and eventful that year must have been to them. They called it 'the dry year.' The corn was only about a finger-length, and they had actually to pull it up by the roots in order to secure the miserable crop. In those old days, with the limitations of intercourse and communication, our fathers were within measurable distance of famine and starvation, and hence the deep and well-defined traces it left in their memories to all time.

1. Now the awful necessity of water as the very condition of life in the natural world measures exactly the function of the Holy Ghost in the spiritual world. He has had a mission in our world from the first. He moved on the face of the waters, bringing order out of confusion, and giving to the world of nature that original beauty, of which there still linger so many wonderful traces, to mark and emphasise its terrible decline. He gave man life in Eden at the first; and after the Fall He has been grappling with evil in human nature, striving and struggling and resisting the bias and direction of sin—a drag on the downward tendency, and a holy incentive to a nobler and better life. But, sad to say, all down the ages this Holy Spirit has been grievously wronged and ill-treated in the world. 'Considering man with a nature subject in so fatal a degree to moral evil,' says John Foster, 'the sacred oracles have represented him as a more melancholy object than Nineveh or Babylon in ruins.' And no wonder. For the saddest manifestation of this moral degeneracy has been the refusal to own the need of any Divine help, in order to

the attainment and reassertion of purity and goodness. Strange, the Son and the Spirit have met with the same ill-usage. They have been despised and rejected of men, both equally and together. If there be any difference, it is that the Spirit's efforts and appeals have been so persistent and long-lived and unwearied! And, looking at the situation from our evangelical standpoint, it would seem as if hardly ever before has there been a more deliberate depreciation of the necessity for spiritual power than now. There is a spirit of bitter antagonism and hostility abroad. The new creed seems to be—a humanity without sin, a Christianity without Christ, and a theology without God. The new civilisation of our time is cold and sapless and spiritually dead. A new antichrist is abroad. Clever and cultured men, as well as the apostles of science, are mostly in revolt against our contention and claim. Since John Foster wrote his famous essay on 'The Aversion of Men of Taste to Evangelical Religion,' near the beginning of this century, many remarkable changes have taken place; but it is questionable if things are not now far worse and this aversion more pronounced and sweeping than even then. And truly, our time is hard and mercenary and worldly. Even the empty forms of religious life must fit in to the prevailing taste of the age, and be fashionable. The craze for riches and pleasure-seeking and sensual indulgence, and luxurious living and intemperance, are all detrimental to spiritual influences and sympathies. The ceaseless craving for amusement and enjoyment is ominous. And the hard and cold negations of agnosticism and secularism and materialism only deaden the finest sensibilities of the soul, and turn

the human heart into flint. Amid the crying needs of our time—in view of the strange unrest and strain and overturning—the hollowness, and empty cheats, and vain illusions, of life—the surging crowd with their sickening, despairing calls for the bread and the water of life—we feel how very far away the mass of men are from being in touch or sympathy with the Supernatural, the Spiritual, the Divine. The world lieth in the wicked one, and its very soul is starved, and shrivelled up, and withered away, for want of God. 'The rebellious dwell in a dry land.'

2. But while the world may occupy this deplorable position, the Church must needs assert her peculiar and privileged position—instinct with spiritual life and Divine power. After Pentecost the promised Comforter began this wonderful work as Christ's representative in the Church. He awakened within her the Christian graces—faith, hope, and charity. The Holy Ghost took possession of the early Christian society, and became its heart and soul and guiding star. There were giants in those days. The apostles and martyrs and confessors became the immortal champions and defenders of the Christian faith; and the secret of it was their loyalty and unswerving devotion to One who had died on a cross. They caught the inspiration that made them invincible. They were all filled with the Holy Ghost. Carlyle never tires telling of the army that settled down in front of what seemed an impregnable fortress, determined to reduce it, or die in the attempt. For long their efforts were vain, and their dead were flung into the ditch that surrounded the town, and formed its defence. But at length the dead filled the ditch and made a bridge for the living, who thus

assaulted the citadel and conquered its defenders. This was signally true of the early Church. The brave Christian heroes made their choice, and endured as seeing Him who is invisible. The suffering was terrible. But the blood of the martyrs was the seed of the Church. In spite of the hateful opposition and jealousy of Judaism, and the cruel and bloody persecution of pagan superstition, the power that possessed the Church slowly but surely undermined the forces that ruled the Roman empire, and at length superseded and destroyed them. Only when men animated by carnal policy came to utilise the power in the interests of statecraft and priestcraft was it turned into weakness. Hence the gloomy darkness that settled down all through the Middle Ages, and the strange spectacle of the Church itself turned persecutor! The Reformation struggle was verily a resurrection from death. And the results have been simply unspeakable in their grandeur. It is sad to think of all the waste, and neglect, and abuse, and loss, of the power that might long since have conquered the world for Christ! How sad is the retrospect when we think what might have been! And even yet few men truly realise the situation. Desperate struggles are being made to give a kind of electric vitality to the cold, dead mass of humanity by sacerdotal pretensions and sacramentarian delusions. Presumptuous men arrogate to themselves the claim and the right to dispense the life and power the Church needs. But it is all a sham and superstition. They remind us of the rain-makers in South Africa, who impose on the ignorance and credulity of their votaries, and victimise and cheat them. Oh! if the Church of God were only aware of the blessed

secret of its true life and power, how soon would it shake the wide world and bring the nations to the feet of Christ! The Christian Church to-day is like Hagar and her boy in the old Bible story—famine-stricken and ready to perish, for the water is spent in the bottle. May God open our eyes, as He opened hers, to see a well of water! then shall we draw water with joy 'out of the wells of salvation.'

3. But our absolute dependence on spiritual help finds its supreme manifestation when we contemplate the necessities of individual human lives. For it is only here we find the true and essential sphere of the spirit's power and working. The evil has found its way into the human heart. There, if anywhere, the battle has to be fought, and the victory won. So long as you cling to the fond imagination that there is a reserve of goodness in the natural heart of man, you may cherish the hope that he will one day redeem his character, and himself climb out of the horrible pit and miry clay. But if you have been forced to the conclusion that sin has mastered and enslaved, and completely paralysed, the energies of his being, so that he is spiritually dead—dead in trespasses and sins; then there must take possession of him, and deal with him effectively, an outside power that shall act like the rain on the bare, brown, barren wilderness, turning death into life, and winter into spring. Only let men come under the conviction of the terrible reality and absolute sway of spiritual death, and they shall frankly admit the necessity of that miracle of grace—the resurrection-life, and awakening, quickening power of God the Holy Ghost. 'To be carnally minded is *death*.' Life is from God. Men of science have been trying to guess its origin. They are agreed

it is not spontaneous. And if the natural life is Divine, so certainly is the spiritual. 'The breath of God, blowing where it listeth, touches with its life the dead souls of men, bears them across the bridgeless gulf between the natural and the spiritual, between the spiritually inorganic and the spiritually organic, endows them with its own high qualities, and develops within them these new and secret faculties by which those who are born again are said *to see the Kingdom of God*.'[1]

This great problem—the greatest of all the problems in the world—forces itself on our solemn consideration with awful urgency. We are like the desperate allied armies in the wilderness of Edom, dying of thirst. The world, the Church, the sinner, depend on God's help. Nothing human or earthly can make amends for the want of this, or act as its substitute. In our utter helplessness and despair we are flung back on the spiritual and the Divine. 'It is the Spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing. Let us anew realise our utter helplessness and dependence on the Holy Spirit for quickening the sinner, and reviving the Church, and converting the world; and humbly wait on God and plead the fulfilment of His gracious promise that the river of the water of life should overflow to the ankles, and to the knees, and to the loins, till at length 'the waters were risen, waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed over . . . and everything shall live whither the river cometh.'

II. THE DITCHES. When Elisha, in response to the appeal of these perishing thousands, gave forth

[1] Drummond's *Natural Law*, p. 72.

the Divine injunction—'Make this valley full of ditches,' it must have filled them with amazement and strange bewilderment. Yet, it was good that in their peculiar circumstances they should have something to occupy them, and call forth their energies. Then there was in it a salutary discipline and education. And best of all, it was fitted to awaken genuine hopefulness and enthusiasm. For were they not called upon to take their share in a great enterprise? They were to become fellow-workers with God, and in some mysterious way contribute to the great end in view. And in this they were only called upon to fulfil their true function. Everybody must conform to this great law, or be left out altogether. The husbandman must study the laws of nature, and in conformity with them plough his fields and sow the seed. The student of science goes deep into the secrets of nature, and aspires to understand and apply her hidden laws. The mariner spreads his sails, and waits for the favourable wind to waft him to the haven he desires to see. Egypt is a rainless land. All the rich fertility of that historic country depends on the annual rise and overflow of the Nile. But even that would serve no purpose whatever unless for the marvellous system of irrigation by which, as here, the whole Nile valley is made full of ditches, and the water distributed on every side. I have stood on the borderland, with the sandy desert on the one side, and the fruitful field, the garden of the Lord, on the other. You are there placed between life and death. You see men cutting and clearing the trenches, and making everything ready for the living water to have free course, and dispense its rich bounties on every hand, when the flood comes.

1. All this has a direct bearing on the moral and religious discipline of life, so as to make room for the great Divine Power that is to renovate and control it. God's grace begins its work in the secret souls of individual men. At the grave of Lazarus, the stone must be rolled away, before the miracle is performed; and after it is over, the same voice that called him from the tomb, 'bound hand and foot with grave-clothes,' must also add—'Loose him, and let him go.' And it is even the same when we try to trace the Divine working in human hearts. Not a little effort and influence of our own, prepares the way beforehand, and gives it completeness and character, after it is over. The early training, and the home influence and example, and the moral and religious, as well as intellectual teaching of youthful days, are the ditches; and if this valley is full of them, it will prove a blessed preparation and pathway for the gracious rain when God sends it. The mechanical education the state provides is not much to be counted on in these days. Children are taught and trained as if by machinery. The ethical element is sadly wanting. It is high time we laid this to heart, and provided against it, both in the Church and at the fireside. And we have to remember our education is life-long. If we mean to build up character, and win for life the human and Christian ideal, we must set ourselves strenuously to the exercise of severe discipline and self-control. We must keep under the body, and tutor the mind, and with all diligence rule the heart. And if, like Daniel, we have the chamber-window open toward Jerusalem, and cherish and cultivate the spiritual and devotional in our daily life, then will the channels be kept clear

and open for the floods of grace to fill our souls with spiritual life and power.

2. But the lesson and admonition apply with special force to the Christian Church. There is a duty here enjoined which is in great danger of being disregarded and neglected. There is a positive risk and strong temptation at this very point. For wealth, and numbers, and outward display, and splendid organisation, and external landmarks generally, are too often regarded as the tokens of spiritual progress and prosperity. And yet there is also danger on the other side. For outward arrangement and order and organisation have a most important sphere and function. If you depend on them exclusively, they will be found 'wells without water, and clouds without rain'; but if duly appreciated, and made use of in their true relation and proportion, they will become the trenches and ditches of grace. Thus, the right and reasonable valuation of the Lord's day and the Lord's table, of God's house and word, and Christian fellowship, and of all the outward and ordinary means of grace, will be a preparation for, and a pledge of, the heavenly benediction: 'Blessed is the man whose strength is in Thee, in whose heart are the ways; who, passing through the valley of Baca, make it a well: the rain also filleth the pools.' The Methodists were so called because, in days of spiritual declension, they determined to live by holy rule and method. The Puritans also got their honoured name because of severe and pure life, in times of loose and vicious indulgence all around them. If we truly long for times of refreshing, we must occupy ourselves with vigorous and active preparation. We must lay aside the weights

and entanglements and besetting sins that might prove a barrier in the way. We must rouse the Church to holy activity and high enthusiasm, and hard work, and prevailing prayer. While crossing the Atlantic some years ago, our ship, near the entrance to the Gulf of St. Lawrence, encountered some enormous icebergs. We had ample warning that we were among them, long ere we saw them, in the sudden fall of the temperature. Though it was midsummer, we began to shiver, and were glad of all the haps and wraps we could find. The sight of the ice in the glow of the setting sun was unspeakably beautiful. But it was a dangerous business, and we had to sail with the utmost caution, and at greatly reduced speed. Yet we had this interesting fact to reassure us—these cold, icy mountains had broken away from their native Arctic home, and were drifting southward to their destruction. The ice-floe and the gulf-stream would soon meet, and the ice would cease to be. Sometimes icebergs drift from the world into the Church, bringing cold and danger along with them; but if there be life, and love, and activity, and any true waiting on God—making this valley full of ditches—the ice-floe of worldliness will speedily melt away and disappear in its encounter with the gulf-stream of spiritual life.

3. There is also an aspect in which this injunction concerns the world. For the world itself is this valley of vision. And if it is ever to be won for Christ, the resources and influences and opportunities of civilisation must be seized and chained to His chariot-wheels. O what vast and varied possibilities are here! In this great Victorian era, we are trying to mark and measure the nation's progress in wealth,

and power, and culture, and discovery, and far-reaching influence. The imagination is hardly equal to the task. Our venerable sovereign rules an empire on which the sun never sets. It bids fair ere long to come true, as Grimm suggested long since, that the language of Shakespeare may ultimately become the language of mankind, and the Anglo-Saxon race rule the world. We are in danger of vain boasting over this Diamond Jubilee. Froude has reminded us of the significant fact that three small countries—Judea, Greece, and Scotland—have each left deep and enduring marks in the fields of time. Still, it is, in God's good providence, our 'day.' It is a great and golden opportunity. It is simply overpowering when we try to imagine what might be, if all the mighty forces that rule our land and impress the whole wide world—if industry and trade and commerce, capital and labour, literature and politics, wealth and culture and intellect and arms, were all baptized into Christ's name, and consecrated to His service and praise for truth and righteousness. O to make *this* valley full of ditches!

III. THE FLOODS. 'Ye shall not see wind, neither shall ye see rain; yet that valley shall be filled with water, that ye may drink.' There was great mystery about it. The Divine Sovereignty was in it. Elijah told his servant to go and look for the rain, and he came after seven times, to say he saw the little cloud arising out of the sea, like a man's hand. Then he himself heard the sound of the abundance of rain. And in the end, the floods overtook them as they ran. There is no sign and no sound and no warning here. It may have been among the moun-

tains miles and miles away whence the floods came down over-night, and filled the prepared and empty ditches with the Divine plenty. Only in recent years have the sources of the Nile been discovered, and the myth and mystery of ages cleared away. Thousands of miles away from the land it is to bless so generously and liberally, the river has three sources—the White and the Blue and the Black Nile. All of them are laden with elements of blessing, and they combine into one mighty flood, to fill the empty water-ways that have been prepared in faith, and are waiting and ready for its coming. It is a grand exercise for faith to make amplest room for the great sweep of the Divine Sovereignty. We need never be afraid to trust God implicitly for His great liberality, if we be willing that He shall bestow it in His own time and way. Our poor, narrow notions, and miserable limitations, may often hinder the full flow and overflow of what God has in His great heart to give. We may even impose conditions of a kind that make it impossible for Him to bless us at all, or make us the blessing we might be to others. We all need grace to curb our natural waywardness and want of faith here, and cherish the spirit of profoundest reverence and reserve, as we wait for God. 'The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit.'

What an anxious time it ought to be with us all, after we have made the valley full of ditches, and are waiting! We have done our part, and are waiting for God to do His! It is the time of severe strain and suspense and absolute dependence. It is the highest

and mightiest attitude the Church can possibly assume. She will be found irresistible, invincible, omnipotent, conquering, and to conquer here. The time has surely come for a new and urgent call to all the churches that 'believe in the Holy Ghost,' and to the Christian men and women who represent them, to unite in one intense and earnest cry for a fresh baptism of the Spirit in His Pentecostal Fire and Power. 'I will pour water on him that is thirsty, and floods on the dry ground.' If God is to bless the world, He will begin with the Church. And if the ditches the Church is making were only flooded with spiritual life, a revived Church would only be the prelude and harbinger of a converted world.

This problem has awful dimensions. It looks to many as if things are only drifting from bad to worse. Unbelief is preaching a gospel of despair. But God Himself stands in the breach, and gives us grand encouragement and inspiration. 'And this,' He adds, 'is but a light thing in the sight of Jehovah; He will deliver the Moabites also into your hands. 'Is there anything too hard for me?' saith the Lord. 'Faith,' said Dr. Hugh Macmillan, in closing the Free Church Assembly of 1897, 'never despairs. It hopes on to the end. God is never weary of His creation. In spite of the failures of humanity, He does not grow tired of it. In spite of all the misery and sin of so many lives, He does not despair of the human race. With each new generation He sends another troop, and means to carry on the war against the evils of the world. He has forces yet in reserve which He has never brought into the field. There are capabilities in His gospel which have never yet been utilised. There are adaptations in the Bible that

have not yet been taken advantage of. There are powers in human nature which have not been called forth. There are lengths and breadths and heights and depths in the love of God that have not yet been measured. During the last eighteen centuries of Christian work, the Redeemer has only received the earnest of His joy—the first-fruits of His great salvation. The full harvest has yet to be gathered in.'

VIII

THE SPIRIT'S MISSION TO THE CHURCH

'Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you.'—JOHN xvi. 7.

SCRIPTURE teaching concerning the Holy Spirit is largely from the lips of our Blessed Lord Himself. And the charm and fascination of it arises mainly from the fact that it is presented to us, not as severe and abstract dogma, but rather as a Divine adaptation to the trying circumstances of these first disciples. Their great Master yearns over them with true human tenderness and sympathy. We may almost regard it in the light of a death-bed scene. He tries hard to break the unwelcome news. Gently, and with thoughtful reserve, He endeavours to tell them the truth. He is, to all intents and purposes, their Spiritual Father. He assures them of unchanging affection and undying devotion. But He must needs go away. It is expedient that He should. True, they cannot measure the real significance of His solemn and pathetic utterances. Sorrow had already filled their hearts. The situation was sadly perplexing, and in great measure unintelligible. They were like children sitting in a darkened room, listening to words of fond last farewell, which completely con-

founded and bewildered them. And so, when He spake with such repeated and emphatic assurance of the coming and mission of the Holy Comforter, they could not appreciate or even understand the blessed heavenly arrangement. For a season it was all lost and wasted on them. It had no real meaning. Jesus spake to them as if in a foreign and unknown tongue. Only when the promised Comforter really came, and began to interpret the gracious promise, did they comprehend what till then had been only a strange enigma. In the gloomy interval they were orphans indeed. A dark eclipse passed over all their vain dreams, and false hopes, and fantastic carnal imaginings concerning the coming of Messiah's kingdom. Only after the Resurrection and Ascension of the Redeemer, did these wayward and perverse men get true and keen spiritual insight. 'These things understood not His disciples at the first; but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they.'

We have here presented to us the true mission of the Holy Spirit to the Church, as distinct from the world. These first disciples were, at the time, the representatives of the true Christian Church, and the brotherhood of believers. They were so far renewed and regenerate men, and the Spirit was already working within them. Their views and impressions were certainly vague and imperfect, and they had only a very inadequate conception of the real character, as well as the ultimate sweep of the Spirit's operations. Yet the Holy Spirit was filling and possessing the man Christ Jesus; and as they came into contact with Him, and were brought under the spell of His holy, heavenly influence and teaching, that same Spirit was communicated, and, though all

unconsciously to themselves, was taking possession of their being. Their spiritual life may have been feeble and ignorant; and they may have had much both to learn and unlearn—as is the case with the best of Christ's followers still—but the Divine fire was kindled and had begun to burn in their souls, and when at length the Spirit came as the Comforter, it was to fan it into a glorious and blessed flame.

Let us note some considerations that rendered it expedient for Christ to go away.

I. *On His own account.*

1. He had left heaven and home and His Father's house, on a benignant and blessed errand. His mission was to reveal the Father, and unfold His great heart of love. He was the incarnation of Divine grace and mercy. He came among sinning, suffering, sorrowing humanity — Immanuel — God with us. He took our nature, and lived and died for us—'that He might bring us to God.' And now He is able to say, 'Father, I have glorified Thee on the earth; I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do.' 'It is finished.' 'And now, O Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was.'

Thus we are called on to contemplate our Lord, as One who has gone 'into a far country, to receive for Himself a kingdom, and to return.' All along He has been busy, and burdened, and baptized with a sacred baptism, in order to the accomplishment of His heavenly commission. He has nothing left to linger over now. He never was treated with much consideration here. 'He came to His own, and His own received Him not.' He never had much of a

home or welcome among men. Well might He say—My work is done down here. It is expedient for *Me* that I go away. I am going home. 'If ye loved me ye would rejoice because I said I go unto the Father.'

2. But there is more than this. Our Lord was qualified to exercise a new function, and lay claim to a new and exalted prerogative, after His humiliation and 'obedience unto death.' 'Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name that is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, and every tongue confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.' He has waiting for Him a home-coming welcome—a new Mediatorial Sovereignty and Supremacy—as the new Head and King of the Church and the world. 'But now we see not yet all things subjected to Him. But we behold Him who hath been made a little lower than the angels, even Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour, that by the grace of God He should taste death for every man.' 'On His head are many crowns.' 'For He must reign, till He hath put all enemies under His feet.'

3. But may there not be something more than even this? When the fulness of time came, it brought with it very distinctively the dispensation of the Spirit. Then came the fulfilling of all the Old Testament promises concerning the Servant of Jehovah, as also His Church and people. Thus the Spirit was the agent in the supernatural and sinless conception of Jesus. It is a profound mystery; but it carries with it the doctrine that He was begotten, not of the flesh, but of the Spirit. Hence the sinlessness of His human nature. But we must guard

against the notion that this holiness and sinlessness are due merely to union with the Divine Nature. 'This wonderful union,' says the late Professor Candlish, 'did not make His soul or body one whit less human; and the holiness He had in His human nature is human holiness, not something above our nature, but the very perfection and crown of it; and in this He is like His brethren, receiving the aid of the Holy Spirit. His being God did not make the preservation of holiness in an ungodly world at all more easy to His flesh and blood, nay, His task was all the harder. Hence we read that He received the Holy Spirit, was filled with the Spirit, was led by the Spirit, anointed with the Holy Spirit; that he was much in prayer to God, and was encouraged by voices from heaven, and strengthened by an angel.'

This consideration is fitted to make a very deep impression on us as we contemplate the suffering Saviour. All through the days of His humiliation His holy human nature was sustained by the indwelling power and presence of the Spirit. But all the while we are called to mark the stress and struggle. The burden of our sin crushed Him. His tender, human sympathy brings Him to our very side. All that Spirit's blessed aid does not seem to relieve Him of the strain that was too great for His burdened, breaking heart. His sinless soul, even with the support bestowed, is overshadowed and overborne by the load of the world's sin. But in the issue His triumph was all the more complete and glorious. And if the Holy Ghost carried His human nature through the conflict with sin and death and hell, and made Him, in the long-run, more than Conqueror, how much more will He glorify Christ's perfect

humanity when it is transferred to heaven? John was 'the disciple whom Jesus loved, who also leant on His breast at supper,' in the days of His flesh; but when 'this same Jesus' appeared to him in His glorified human nature, 'in the Isle that is called Patmos,' he saw 'One like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about at the breasts with a golden girdle. His head and His hair were white as white wool, white as snow; and His eyes were as a flame of fire; and His feet like unto burnished brass, as if it had been refined in a furnace; and His voice as the voice of many waters. And He had in His right hand seven stars: and out of His mouth proceeded a sharp two-edged sword: and His countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.' And this same John says—'When I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead.'

These three considerations might have weighed with our Lord, had He been disposed to press His own claims, and consider His own interests. And even if He thought not of Himself, let us think of Him, and acknowledge His magnanimity. But all the more on that account let us do homage to His Eternal Sonship, and Mediatorial Sovereignty, and Glorified Humanity—'in that Presence where,' for Him as for us, 'there is fulness of joy; and at that right hand, where there are pleasures for evermore.'

II. *For the sake of His Disciples.*

1. The Transfiguration of our Lord is a unique chapter in His earthly life. The wonder of it is, that 'there talked with Him two men, which were Moses and Elijah; who appeared in glory, and spake of His decease which He was about to accomplish at

Jerusalem.' This conversation must have been listened to, and remembered, and communicated later on, in order to find a place in the Gospel story; and it should not have startled or surprised those who heard it, for Christ had often spoken to them in a similar strain. Yet they had never taken it fully in. On one such occasion Peter rebuked Him, and said—'Be it far from thee, Lord; this shall not be unto thee.' As the end drew near, Caiaphas, being high priest *that year*, addressing the Jewish Council, gave utterance to words of which he did not understand the meaning, when he said—'Ye know nothing at all, nor do ye take account, that it is *expedient* for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not.' All this must have been painfully present to the mind and heart of the Redeemer Himself. In the words of the institution of the Last Supper He tries, with exquisite tenderness, to bring it home to them. The bitter cup of Gethsemane, and the cruel crown of thorns, and the dread cross of Calvary, lay between Him and His Father's house; and He was now on the verge of these final acts in the life-long tragedy, in which He 'appeared once in the end of the age, to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.' When 'His hour was come that He should depart out of this world unto the Father,' He must needs go through the valley of the shadow of death. 'Awful necessity this,' Cromwell was heard saying to himself, when he went to Whitehall to view the beheaded King Charles; and even so, with deepest reverence and awe, as we linger over the dark and mysterious exigencies of the situation, may we not accept the Saviour's own explanation—awful necessity this—it is expedient for you!

2. On the Great Day of Atonement, the high priest, after offering the sacrifice, went into the Holy of Holies. Our Great High Priest has done the very same. He has gone to appear in the presence of God for us. The work, finished on earth, is now continued in heaven. He has there to vindicate and make valid the claim of His people to all the blood-bought benefits of His Redemption-work. We have now in Him a Friend at court—the very court of heaven. He is there invested with a high function on our behalf. In Him 'we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous.' He is engaged to plead our cause, and secure our interests, and interpret our prayers, and give expression to our human sympathies, in a way and to an extent that can only be undertaken and accomplished by one who understands equally well the Divine and the human heart.

'He who for men their surety stood,
And pour'd on earth His precious blood,
Pursues in heaven His mighty plan,
The Saviour and the Friend of man.

With boldness, therefore, at the throne,
Let us make all our sorrows known;
And ask the aids of heavenly power
To help us in the evil hour.'

3. But in addition to all this, there was also involved the spiritual enlargement of their knowledge, and the gracious discipline of their character. They had arrived at an important stage in Christian life—midway between childhood and manhood. The happy home life had to be broken up. It was as when 'an

eagle stirreth up her nest, fluttereth over her young, spreadeth abroad her wings, taketh them, beareth them on her wings.' They were now to leave behind them their gentle, clinging, tender, human attitude towards the Son of Man. They were to have borne in upon them enlarged spiritual conceptions of His character and mission. The upheaval they dreaded so much—and in the reality of which they were so unwilling to believe—was for them a blessing in disguise. It was intended to brace their character, and make sense give place to faith. They were to be thrown back upon their own resources; yet in such a way as to give them true strength and inspiration, from fellowship and sympathy with the Unseen and the Divine. To most men and women the breaking-up of home is epoch-making. The wrench tears up the very roots of life. But it goes to the making of true manhood and womanhood. There comes with this harsh and hard experience—sometimes suddenly enough, and with startling surprise—the change that makes the very child a full-grown man. They tell us that the ill-fated Marie Antoinette grew old in a single night, and that in the morning her hair had turned white. And no wonder. She lived years in these few hours. And certainly these first disciples, in this crisis of their spiritual life, grew old and experienced in the brief space of these eventful six weeks. They could hardly be identified at the end as the same men. The change is positively miraculous. The sudden departure of their Master and Friend has roused and developed and educated the depths of their natural and spiritual character, and made beautifully apparent the stability and maturity of their Christian manhood.

III. *That He might send the Comforter.*

1. The point first claiming careful notice is—the immediate connection between the Saviour's going and the Spirit's coming. 'If I go not away, the Comforter will not come; but if I go, I will send Him unto you.' John had previously said (vii. 39)—'The Spirit was not yet, because Jesus was not yet glorified.' The glorified humanity of our blessed Lord, we have already indicated, involved the full reception, on His part, of the Holy Ghost. Thus He would be able to send the Spirit as His very own, and as coming with the blessed commission of both the Father and the Son. 'For this purpose,' says Luthardt, 'the Spirit must first become His Spirit in the fullest sense of the word, namely, by the fact that His human nature, instead of being a limit to the Spirit, became utterly and entirely the Spirit's. And moreover, He must enter into that Divine position by reason of which He, then free from the limitation of the life within the world, could impart this His Spirit everywhere with Divine unconditionality. He could do that only from heaven; for only as being in heaven did He become super-mundane and of universal power.' Or, as Godet puts it—'That Jesus might send the Spirit, He must possess Him as His own personal life, and that as man, since it is to men that He is to impart Him. This supposes the complete glorification of His human nature.'

2. The mission of the Spirit in the character of Comforter requires some explanation and vindication. 'A *Paraclete*,' says Bishop Pearson, 'in the notion of the Scriptures, is an Intercessor.' In simple literal meaning, He is a person called to the side of another. He may thus befriend, and help, and defend by word

or deed, as the necessities of the case demand. He may thus become an Advocate, in the technical, forensic meaning of the word. His true Personality is also taught and acknowledged, in His being styled 'another Comforter,' as if the very counterpart of Christ Himself—come to take His place, and continue His blessed, comforting work. In His offices He is, to the believer on earth, all that Christ is to him in heaven. Like Barnabas, he becomes to the children of God 'a son of consolation.' His true function is to be to the Church in all ages what Christ had been to these first disciples, to be *in* men the Intercessor, on earth, as Christ is the Advocate *for* them, in heaven. He is here revealed—

(1) As a permanent indwelling Power and Presence in the heart and life of the believer. 'He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you'—'that He may abide with you for ever.' O what an amazing wonder meets us here! The humiliation of the Son consisted in His taking our nature, and living in our world—familiar with sin and sorrow and death. He was with the wild beasts in the wilderness. The devil tempted Him and tried to tamper with His loyalty to truth and righteousness and high heaven. Worst of all, the men He came to save rejected and condemned Him to a felon's shameful death. But what words shall we employ when we try to describe the humiliation of the Holy Ghost! He actually condescends to come and take up His abode within us. 'What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.'

(2) As the Great Teacher. Christ Himself had exercised this function. The germs of spiritual truth had been carefully implanted in their souls. But they were only dull and bewildered scholars in Christ's school. They had a mass of Divine and spiritual teaching in their memory, and yet only when the Spirit came did it become intelligible. It was as if one stood gazing on a beautiful stained glass window from the outside—only to find it all confusion and perplexing contradiction and chaos, till a guide came on the scene, and led the way inside, when all became suddenly transformed into exquisite beauty and surpassing loveliness and harmony. Even so, when the Spirit of Truth comes to any one of Christ's disciples, He reveals the truth in its right perspective and proportion, and all the disjointed and broken bits of truth and goodness, which hitherto had been incoherent and unintelligible, became a new revelation—'the truth as it is in Jesus.' 'He shall bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.'

(3) As a witness. Jesus is the Witness of the Father. Through Him the Father reaches us, and we reach the Father. 'All that the Father hath is mine.' This great word seems to admit us into the secret of His inner Divine consciousness. 'Therefore said I, He taketh of mine, and shall shew it unto you.' This 'mine' is the burden of the Spirit's testimony concerning Christ. It is the witness borne as to the greatness of His Person and word and work. Strange, it is never about Himself, but always and only about the Son. He has a peculiar and definite mission to glorify Jesus in the hearts of these apostolic men. The Son has glorified the Father on the

earth, and now the Father is about to glorify the Son by exalting Him to heaven. Then it will be the high prerogative of the Holy Ghost to realise the glorification of Christ on earth and among men. These disciples were in their turn to witness for Christ, and glorify Him. But in order to make that possible, the Spirit must come down into their poor, dull, darkened hearts, and there light up, in all its sublime magnificence and glory, the very essence of the blessed gospel—'Jesus Christ and Him crucified.' They were meanwhile appointed by Christ Himself the trustees of the truth concerning the official character and work of the world's Great Redeemer; and the Spirit was now to adequately endow them for the discharge of that high function, by first guiding them into all truth, and then Himself inspiring them unerringly to communicate that blessed legacy to the church and the world.

IX

THE SPIRIT'S MISSION TO THE WORLD

'And He, when He is come, will convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go to the Father, and ye behold Me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world hath been judged.'—JOHN xvi. 8-11.

THE Holy Ghost accomplishes his first great triumph for Christ, when He is sent as 'the Comforter' to dwell within the heart of the disciples, and enlighten them, and make the absent Redeemer glorious and worthy in their estimation. But this is immediately followed up by another great achievement, which is realised through their instrumentality. The Spirit first works *in* them, and then *through* them. He is given as 'another Comforter' by the Father, in answer to the prayer of the Son, to the Church; but He is one 'whom the world cannot receive, for it beholdeth Him not, neither knoweth Him.' And yet He must needs use the disciples, and turn them into apostles, in order to work conviction, and gain His great moral victory over the world. We shall take occasion later on to consider in detail the marvellous results of Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost; but we may be permitted to make a passing reference to it now, as affording a magnificent illustration of the fulfil-

ment of this wonderful and gracious promise. We there seem to see the spiritual machinery actually at work—producing startling and unlooked-for results. What we have now to ponder is the principle on which it proceeds, and the Divine warrant here given, for the expectation that the pledge it gave will be abundantly made good.

The Spirit is to *convict* the world. This work of conviction may involve a process both complicated and protracted. It carries with it a large variety of aspects—all of which may form elements in the case. To convict, to convince, to reprove, any one of these, or perhaps all of them together, may convey to us the meaning of the original Greek verb, so as to bring out the legal, and ethical, and penal considerations, that go to complete this great, deep, spiritual soul-exercise. And the *world* in which this conviction is to take effect is not to be regarded as hopelessly lost. The Jewish world seemed to be condemned and doomed. Yet the great commission was—begin at Jerusalem. The case for the world is hopeful, under the Spirit's reproof. There is presented an awful alternative. The issue may be, either conversion, or hardening and impenitence. If the spiritual exercise lead to genuine faith and repentance, it is the gracious working of the Holy Ghost; but if, in the case of any, there be deliberate resistance and rebellion, that same Spirit will demonstrate to them that their condemnation is righteous, and that their blood is on their own heads.

What strange trinity meets us here—Sin, Righteousness, Judgment! Yet they are all in line. They imply each other. They are successive chapters in

the history of Redemption, and form the groundwork on which the Spirit carries home conviction to the conscience and heart of man. We may sometimes be inclined to wonder that more definite mention is not here made of the apostles and human instruments of the Spirit's agency. They are not ignored, or forgotten. It is only the blaze of the Glorious Being working wonders by means of them, that for the moment overshadows them. At times we view the work as if all done by man, and can hardly make any room for God; and truly, when we come to see the profound mystery of the Holy Ghost grappling with these awful problems, even when He condescends to enlist our sympathy and help, we shall best discharge this instrumental service when we are content to be forgotten. If the Spirit speaks not of Himself in this Holy Service, we may well be silent. Christ alone is to be exalted and made glorious in the appreciation of those whom the Spirit is to convict concerning Sin, Righteousness, and Judgment. 'And I,' says the Saviour Himself, 'if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men *unto Me*.'

I. 'He will convict the world of sin; because they believe not on Me.'

1. To a devout and respectable Jew sin was very apt to be seriously misunderstood. Both goodness and badness were in danger of being measured by mere outward Levitical law. Thus there came to be entertained an utterly inadequate idea of the deep-rooted nature of evil in the heart of man. To be truly understood, it must be traced back to its first terrible outbreak in Eden. Human depravity is not

to be explained away as merely a weakness or misfortune. The moral blame of wrong-doing can never be separated from the wrong-doer. This is often attempted. Unhappy conditions, associations, misfortunes, men, society, and even God Himself sometimes, are credited with the responsibility, and have the blame laid at their door. It is a slander and a deliberate falsehood. But the real explanation of all this perversity is due to the fact that sinners are naturally blind to 'the exceeding sinfulness of sin'; and they only come to understand it, and plead guilty, when the Spirit works in them this first true lesson in Christian experience.

2. This conviction is not concerned merely with outward and isolated actions of evil, for which plausible excuse and apology might be sought and found. It goes deep down, and challenges the root-principle of sin in man's heart. At once and for ever, it brings home the charge, and lays bare the crime. The rejection and crucifixion of Christ is sin's direst and most desperate effort. Supreme goodness comes on an errand of mercy, only to be spurned away. Love is cruelly murdered. God's own Son, in the very attitude of noblest self-renunciation, and good-will to men, is betrayed and slandered, condemned and done to death. I have heard it said that wounded and dying soldiers on the battlefield have been known to thrust a dagger at the heart of a benefactor, while in the act of binding up their wounds, and holding water to their burning lips. Such baseness is all but incredible. For the credit of our common human nature, we would like to think of such as *madmen*—bereft of reason on the field of blood and woe—and not incarnate fiends inspired with the malignity and

hate of hell. But what apology shall we offer for what has been called 'the tragedy of Good Friday'? You may gather up ten thousand tokens and traces of sin's evil work in this weary world of ours, but they will all pale away out of sight in front of the cross. Sin's true nature, and power, and awful, untold possibilities can best be learnt there. The alienation of the human heart from God is here verified and proved with terrible significance. The cross thus becomes the standard by which alone sin can be truly measured, and its enormity calculated and realised. Nor was it alone the action of a delirious crowd of infatuated Jews. When conviction works contrition, then every sinner is turned into a penitent. 'They shall look on Me whom they have pierced, and mourn.' No sinful man can exculpate himself, or throw the blame on his brother here—'that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may be brought under the judgment of God.' 'A man that hath set at nought Moses' law dieth without compassion on the word of two or three witnesses: of how much sorer punishment, think ye, shall he be judged worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, a common thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of Grace?'

3. But the conviction here implied goes further still. For sin, in striking its malignant blow at the Son, aims at the Father as well. In Eden, Satan attempted to throw dark suspicion on God's veracity and trustworthiness; and here the sinner's unbelief in the Son has actually 'called God a liar, because he has not believed the record God has given of His Son.' Thus sin seeks to undermine and overturn the

great white throne and Him who sits on it. It boldly defies both Righteousness and Judgment. It would drag heaven down to hell, and exalt hell to heaven. It would make wrong right, and right wrong. It challenges the sovereignty and supremacy of Jehovah, and seeks to destroy Him. It wants men to think and say—'Evil, be thou my good,' in the confidence that it will pay better, and bring to this poor mortal life a richer and rarer reward. It says, in perfect defiance of heaven's righteous law, and Law-Giver—'I shall sin without suffering its punishment.' In this aspect of it, sin bewilders and confuses and demoralises the nature of men so absolutely, that they league themselves with devils, and seek to persuade earth to take sides with hell, against the character and the very Being of God Himself.

What a tremendous undertaking has the blessed Spirit in hand, when He comes to undo all this, and bring home the awful load of guilt to the conscience and heart of the sinner! And what an astounding spiritual revelation to the sinner himself when confronted with bleeding, crucified Love! History tries to tell of the appalling agony of remorse that took possession of the bloody Herod, after the cruel murder of his beautiful and high-born wife—Mariamne. The story is such that human language is utterly baffled in the attempt to describe the torture of the man. She seemed to have been the only being he was ever capable of loving; and yet his rage and jealousy made him her murderer. But when he came to realise what he had done, it made of him a madman. 'He rose from his sleepless bed, and wandered like a ghost through the palace at

midnight, calling Mariamne! He could not be made to understand she was dead. And so the miserable wretch never got over it.' What an abyss of evil the convicted sinner comes to discover in himself! And the terrible culmination and climax of it all is to be found in this—that he treated as his worst enemy his best Friend; and that in the blindness and madness of unbelief, he had it in his heart to disown and seek to destroy Him. But it is no longer with the sinner, as it was with that monster, Herod, whose hopeless remorse eventually slew him; for, with penitence there is provided a full, free, gracious pardon. The blood of Jesus 'speaketh better things than that of Abel.' It speaks peace It cries, not for vengeance, but forgiveness. It can cleanse the sin committed against itself. And the blessed fruition of all this is to be found in the fulfilment of Ezekiel's great promise—'And I will establish My covenant with thee; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD; that thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the Lord GOD.'

II. 'Of righteousness, because I go to My Father, and ye see Me no more.'

1. In the Jewish religious world, righteousness was in danger of being misunderstood, quite as much as sin. The conception of both was wanting in true inwardness and depth. The Pharisee degraded righteous living into a miserable external drudgery and bondage. There was no heart or soul in it. And what they had not for themselves, they were not

able to appreciate in other and better men. Hence their severe and unjust criticism of Christ. The Church people were relentless and persistent in their persecution and misrepresentation. They refused to give Him credit for goodness, because He was so much associated with bad people—'A friend of publicans and sinners.' It is passing strange that His generation should have been so utterly blind to the greatest thing in the world to-day—the absolute moral perfection of Christ's character. He was the only Righteous One. And indeed He had a mission just here. For, in the striking words of Godet, 'He teaches the world what *righteousness* really is, by making it see its new and only true type, in the Person of One condemned as a malefactor by the righteousness of the age, but exalted by God to His right hand, and who from the heaven to which He has vanished, acts with sovereign power. The Holy Spirit, in this respect, exercises in some sort the functions of a court of appeal. Good Friday had attributed sin to Jesus, and righteousness to His judges; Pentecost reversed the sentence. It was to the condemned that righteousness belonged, it was His judges who were malefactors.'

2. But surely this righteous Victim of wrong must have had some high and worthy end in view. Has He not come into this rebellious province of this great universe of God, to unfold and illustrate and make beautiful, the majesty of His Divine law? 'The Lord is well-pleased for His righteousness' sake; He will magnify the law, and make it honourable.' You behold One here setting Himself to *live* righteousness—not as of old in Eden, the very garden of the Lord—but as if, in some far-off penal settlement,

where the conditions were all adverse, and the forces working with terrible effect the wrong way. 'He lives over again (so to speak),' says a quaint author, 'the life of Abel, the life of Enoch, the life of Noah, the life of Abraham, the life of all believers, in all ages, giving for them to God an obedience as broad as the law, and as pure as the heart of God.' But the strange thing is, though He keeps that law in solitary, sinless perfection, He is pursued and punished as if He were a greater malefactor than the two thieves between whom He was condemned to die. It can only mean that He is thereby fulfilling His high function in this guilty world's redemption, 'to finish transgression and make an end of sin, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness.'

3. It was expedient that Christ should go away. He had said—'It is finished.' The righteousness is perfect and complete. And now He must go and present it in person—as the God-Man. His Father shows His approbation and appreciation of His life and work, in that He raised Him from the dead, and glorified Him. And now in the heavenlies, Christ appears—'Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.' When He went away home to God, the disciples stood gazing after Him. But the two in white apparel put them right. They told them Jesus had gone to stay. And we may be sure He got a right royal welcome, up through the shining ranks of the heavenly hosts, to the throne where the Father waited to crown Him with glory and honour—saying —'Sit Thou at My right hand.'

The convincing Spirit is to come to give His faith-

ful testimony to righteousness as true of Christ—inasmuch as He is gone to the Father, and remains out of sight. That conviction brings home to me the fact that my sin was laid on Him, and His perfect righteousness is made over to me; that when I by living faith appropriate Christ, my righteousness is in heaven, and Christ is my security for grace and glory. 'One day,' says John Bunyan, 'as I was passing in the field, suddenly this sentence fell upon my soul—"*Thy righteousness is in heaven*," and methought withal, I saw with the eyes of my soul, Jesus Christ at God's right hand: *there was my righteousness*; so that wherever I was, or whatever I was doing, God could not say of me, "He wants my righteousness," for there it was before Him. Also I saw that the good frame of my heart could not make my righteousness better, nor yet the bad frame of my heart make my righteousness worse; for my righteousness was Jesus Christ Himself, the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever. Now did my chains fall off—I was loosed from afflictions and irons; my temptations also fled away.'

'Thy righteousness alone
Can clothe and beautify.
I 'll wrap it round my soul,
In this to live and die.'

III. 'Of Judgment, because the prince of this world hath been judged.'

When that old serpent, the devil, succeeded in his temptation of man in Eden, he acquired a mysterious and awful power over both our race and our world. He has made a claim over both as if they were his very own. He is called 'the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children

of disobedience.' Three times over he is called by Christ Himself, 'the prince of this world.' It may have been that Christ only acknowledged Satan's claim to the kingdom, now that his title was to be disputed, and he himself tried and condemned in the law courts of heaven as a usurper and pretender. Could our blessed Lord ever forget the terrible ordeal through which even He was compelled to pass, when Satan showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them; and he said—'All these things will I give Thee if Thou wilt fall down and worship me.' It was a fascinating and tempting bribe. It in reality meant a near, and easy, and early way to the crown and the throne. It would have saved Him the cross and the thorny crown. But the fatal condition was, that Christ should do homage to him, and acknowledge his sovereign supremacy. We cannot imagine what might have been, if the old deceiver had prevailed on that eventful day! But, blessed be God, he ignominiously failed. The Seed of the woman—the Word made flesh—had come down for the very purpose of challenging the usurper's claim; and while His own heel was bruised in the terrible struggle, yet He has been successful in bruising the serpent's head, and breaking his presumptuous and false authority. 'The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me,' Christ says; and yet, on that very account, he conspired with sinful men to accomplish His condemnation and death. But it involved his own judgment and overthrow. Then he was practically pronounced the enemy of righteousness, and God, and man; and his kingdom was taken from him, and given to the righteous Son of God, as the true reward of His conflict and victory.

It is not sin, or the world so much, as Satan that has been judged. The Spirit comes to make good this great Divine issue. The prince of this world is henceforth defeated, and discredited, and condemned. The conviction is brought home to the sinner, that this bankrupt and broken-down prince has now no title to lordship or authority over us. We shall only be worse than fools and madmen, if we permit him longer to impose on us, and tempt us with the glitter and the glory of this vain world. Thus sinful men under the Spirit's teaching and working are constrained to transfer their allegiance from Satan to Christ, and place their crown on His blessed and righteous head. One day Whitfield was preaching, and on the fringe of the crowd a titled lady, proud, and vain, and worldly, drew up in her carriage to listen. Drawing a bow at a venture, and calling her by name, the preacher put up her soul to auction. Both Satan and Christ were bidding against each other. Sin, and pleasure, and the world were put over against pardon, and peace, and life eternal; and in that hour she was led by the convincing Spirit to give the world up, and choose Christ and heaven. May that same choice, and all the blessedness it brings along with it, be yours and mine!

X

THE DAY IN WHICH HE WAS TAKEN UP

'And He led them out as far as to Bethany, and He lifted up His hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and was carried up into heaven.'—LUKE xxiv. 50, 51 (R.V.)

THIS was a most eventful and memorable day. It was of great account on earth because the Redeemer was leaving it. He could now tell His Father—'I have glorified Thee on the earth; I have finished the work Thou gavest me to do.' He had humbled and emptied Himself. 'Though He were the Son, yet learned He obedience by the things that He suffered.' It was a great lesson, in a hard school, and under most trying conditions. But He had bravely faced the issue; and He has emerged triumphant. The mystery of incarnation and human suffering and temptation brought Him down into the region of human brotherhood and sympathy. His obedience unto death took Him further down still—into that awful penal settlement, the very abyss of evil—where He hath trodden the wine-press alone, tasting death for every man. He has endured the cross, despising the shame, and is about to sit down 'at the right hand of the throne of God.' His triumph over sin and death and hell is now complete and enduring, and

He stands on the borderland between two worlds with the cross behind Him and the crown before Him.

But that day was of much account in heaven also; for, after the great errand of mercy that took Him away has been accomplished, He is expected home. He says to His Father—'And now come I to Thee.' It is as if some brave youth had left his home, and joined the army, and gone to the wars. He has won victory on many a hard-fought field, and has cuts and wounds and honourable scars in plenty. But now the campaign is ended with brilliant triumph and honourable peace. The day of his return has arrived; and they are waiting to give him glad welcome to his old home, and do him honour as a hero, of whose achievements they had reason to be proud. Even so, 'the day in which He was taken up' awakened supreme interest in heaven. For God had raised Him from the dead, and was now to give Him glory. He who had led captivity captive, was now to ascend on high, and be crowned as Mediatorial King. His heel has been bruised in the dreadful conflict with evil. 'His visage was so marred more than any man, and His form more than the sons of men.' 'He was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities.' But in that awful conflict He has 'put away' sin, and defeated death, and finally and for ever bruised and crushed the old serpent's head. And, though we see not yet all things put under His feet, He is being taken up to be 'crowned with glory and honour.' And the marvel—the miracle of it all is, that He shall appear in heaven in true *human* face and form. In His pure, perfect, glorified humanity He is to take the place of honour, as 'the Lamb in the midst of the throne.' In order to be in a fit position

to send the sevenfold Spirit to do His almighty work on earth, He must Himself ascend the throne, and receive the fulness of the Holy Ghost into His completely glorified human nature. There, without measurement or limitation, that Spirit must possess and fill Him, so as to become His very own; and so become His royal gift and heritage to men on earth. Mediatorial sovereignty is thus to be the Redeemer's highest function and prerogative; and, as has been finely said, He is about to 'gather into His pierced hands the reins of providential government,' and rule the Church and the world both from His great white throne.

I. What means that mysterious interval—*the great forty days*—between the Resurrection and Ascension? It has been suggested[1] that if we had only the narrative in the last chapter of St. Luke's Gospel to guide us, we might conclude that both these events occurred, the one in the morning and the other in the evening of the same day. But his continuation of the history in the beginning of the Acts of the Apostles, makes it plain that our Lord was in no indecent haste, or needless hurry, to get back again to heaven. He allowed the throne to remain unoccupied for forty days after His royal right and title to it had been vindicated by His resurrection from the dead. It was a kind of hiatus, or parenthesis, or intermediate state, between the earthly and the heavenly. We may not understand all the ends to be served by this time of transition, but it is not difficult to discover most valuable interests secured for the Church while He lingered.

[1] Hanna, and others.

1. He gave positive proof of the truth of His resurrection. To His disciples and friends we are indebted exclusively for the evidence on which this doctrine is founded:—'To whom also He showed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days.' The fact that He only appeared to His friends, might be thought to vitiate their evidence. They might be considered as only partial and prejudiced witnesses. They may have imposed on others, or they may have imposed upon themselves. But their evidence will stand the strain, and vindicate itself, inasmuch as Christ's rising again was a surprise and an incredible wonder to them. They thought all was over with their Master and His cause when He died. 'We trusted,' they mournfully said, 'that it had been He who should have redeemed Israel.' And Thomas refused to give credence to the report, unless on condition of the most matter-of-fact and tangible evidence imaginable. In witnessing to this fact, they witness against themselves, and admit the stubbornness of their incredulity. And then, as old familiar friends, they were able to identify the risen Saviour. At least ten different appearances, in widely differing circumstances, are recorded; and in all probability there were many, many more. They saw Him and heard Him. They walked and talked and ate and drank with Him. And the surest thing about it all was this—the new and powerful inspiration Christ's resurrection communicated to them. After their miserable collapse, they rallied and were transformed. Their ruined ideal, which the cross had dashed in pieces, was reconstructed and remodelled. The new creed and the new gospel centred in the fact of the resurrection of Christ. And when, little

more than thirty years after the event, St. Paul wrote his sublime and magnificent argument in his first Epistle to the Corinthians, on the Risen Christ as the fundamental fact of his gospel, he made the frank admission that everything else turned on this, and stood or fell along with it. The 'many infallible proofs,' therefore, that Christ is risen indeed, are due to the forty days' sojourn on earth before 'the day in which he was taken up.' All who had known Him before were able to swear to His identity, and prove that the cross had not destroyed the continuity of life in the crucified and the glorified body.

'Christ is risen! Christ is risen!
He hath left the rocky prison,
And the white-robed angels glimmer 'mid the cerements of His grave;
He hath smitten with His thunder
Every gate of brass asunder,
He hath burst death's iron fetters—irresistible to save!

2. He had many things to say to His disciples, and it was only now that they could bear them. The cross had thrown them into a state of utter confusion and bewilderment. The two on the way to Emmaus make their honest acknowledgment of the hopelessness of the situation. They were filled with blank despair. Everything had gone wrong. They had been building castles in the air; and with the sudden and unexpected execution of their great Master as a guilty criminal, they had all tumbled to pieces. The way in which their unrecognised Lord bore with their ignorance and foolishness and slowness of heart to believe, is very wonderful and very beautiful. Verily, His gentleness made them great. And it affords a very practical illustration of the work that needed to

be done in the way of correcting and modifying their perverted views of Scripture teaching. The new interpretation of their dear and cherished Messianic hopes, in the fresh light of Calvary and its cross, must have been a rude shock to their Jewish prejudice and ambition. But it laid the foundation on which their shattered creed was to be rehabilitated; and when, to their amazement, the certainty of the resurrection came in to give it character and verification, everything fell into its place, and they felt they had a new message of peace and good-will for the world. These forty days must have been memorable in the history of their spiritual and theological education. For indeed it made of them new men altogether. It was as if two notes were wanting in a strain of music, producing only discord and confusion and intensest pain; but when they fitted in and had their place, they made a beautiful and harmonious melody. The cross and the resurrection were the missing links in the chain of grace. 'The sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow,' had now for them an altogether new significance and connection; and they became burdened to give this new Gospel proclamation far and wide. These great forty days of fellowship with their risen Lord had wrought a revolution in their views and feelings so radical and sweeping that, literally and truly, old things passed away and all things became new. The time was not wasted or lost, for it was pregnant and fruitful in great issues that have blessed the world ever since.

3. The manner of His manifestation of Himself to His own is also noteworthy. He was done with His enemies. He now gives Himself exclusively to communication and communion with His friends.

After clearly and certainly establishing His personal identity, He shows a very thoughtful and beautiful faculty of adaptation to their individual cases and circumstances. He deals out encouragement and sympathy, rebuke and warning, in their true proportion. To Mary and Peter and Thomas, and no doubt to many more, He spoke great words in season. He makes plain that the old earthly relationship no longer subsists, but that something greater and better and more spiritual has taken its place. At the same time we have to remark a strange and peculiar reservation of Himself. That word to Mary—'Touch me not, for I am not yet ascended,' implies His wish to impress her with the fact that His attitude then was only provisional and temporary. There might have been, on the part of the disciples, a hasty assumption that He had already ascended to His Father, and was now returned. This would give scope to their vain imaginations about the earthly kingdom and court. But they were altogether mistaken. 'They do wrong,' says Calvin, 'in that, contenting themselves merely with the half of His resurrection, they desire to have Him present in the world.' But He is as yet only midway between the grave and the glory; and meanwhile, through this privileged woman who saw and knew the Risen One, the reassuring and consoling message comes—'Say unto them, I ascend unto My Father, and your Father; and to My God, and your God.'

II. *The Tryst at Jerusalem.* Much of the time had no doubt been spent in Galilee. It was quiet and homely. Both for the Lord and the disciples it had very tender and sacred associations. The greatest

and best impressions of His whole earthly ministry lingered around that Galilean lake.

> 'How pleasant to me thy deep blue wave,
> O sea of Galilee!
> For the Glorious One who came to save
> Hath often stood by thee.'

Was it here that 'He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once'? The simple people among the hills there gave Christ a kindlier welcome than did the dwellers in Jerusalem. And it was natural for Him to linger lovingly among them during these latest days on earth; and to honour them to be the witnesses of His resurrection. St. Paul must have met some of them, and set high value on their testimony; for, writing more than thirty years later, he declared that 'the greater part of them remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.'

But on the day in which He was taken up there was a new tryst kept with His disciples at Jerusalem. It was meet they should gather there that day. For the cross had been there. And the empty grave was there. And He must needs end His work where they were so soon to begin theirs—'beginning at Jerusalem.' I wonder if they arranged their meeting to be in the 'large upper room furnished,' where the Lord's Supper had been so recently instituted, and 'where,' also, it may have been, 'the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews,' and Jesus came in 'when the doors were shut,' on the evening of the resurrection day. It is not likely there were many upper rooms in the city available for such a gathering; and it is pleasing to think of one consecrated spot associated with the most memorable and sacred scenes on earth.

Our main concern now, however, is with the valedictory message and charge to His disciples given by their Risen Lord and Master on the eve of His ascension to glory.

1. There must have been anticipations among the disciples that this gathering might have important and far-reaching consequences. It doubtless formed the chief subject of conversation and speculation during the journey from Galilee. And so satisfied were they in regard to it, that they anticipated everything He might have to say, and boldly and bluntly stated their expectation. 'When they therefore were come together, they asked of Him, saying, Lord, wilt Thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?' We are not called upon thoughtlessly to criticise and blame these disciples here. If they had the impression on their hearts that Jesus had gone to the Father, and had now returned, nothing was to them more likely than that the Messianic kingdom should now take shape. And then they were writhing and wincing under the galling and humiliating yoke of Roman bondage and oppression. True, all this was narrow and misplaced, and sadly out of its right proportion, as compared with the great Divine programme. And perhaps it had also in it a mixture of petty Jewish vanity and ambition. But it was the true and honest expression of both their patriotism and their piety. It was also an indication of their loyalty to Christ, and desire to see Him occupy His royal position; though it may have been unconsciously linked with the pardonable expectation of themselves sharing the glory with Him.

The Lord of these devout and honest-hearted men treats them with unmistakable gentleness and con-

sideration. He does not directly give an answer to their curious question; but He forestalls it, and contrives to put aside their idle and needless curiosity about the order of the future altogether; and supersedes it by a great summons to occupy themselves with the momentous duties and responsibilities of the present hour. 'It is not for you to know the times or seasons, which the Father hath set within His own authority.' They were not to trouble themselves in this connection. It was not the business they had in hand, and had better be left with God. This is a lesson the Church and the disciples of Christ are slow and reluctant to learn. The problems about unfulfilled prophecy, and Israel's future, and Christ's coming again, form a strong temptation for many, to idle and unprofitable guess-work and speculation. We ought indeed to be on our watch-tower; and our Lord's second coming should bulk large and beautiful 'to faith's foreseeing eye.' This great event should be to the believer, what the mighty Monte Rosa is to the traveller in the sunny plains of Lombardy. Wherever he may be, at a distance of five miles or fifty, it always towers above him in its majestic and splendid presence. And yet it is dangerous to lift this great doctrine out of its true spiritual perspective. It will dwarf and wither and starve the soul, and withdraw its sympathies and energies from the practical, personal service that is to prepare the way for the coming of the kingdom and the King. 'It is a weakness which has not died out of the Church to this day. For some persons it seems a hard lesson to learn that periods of time during which Divine dispensations run on unchanged, as well as such epochs or crises of change as do come at last—both the date

of the one, and the duration of the other—are things which the Father has "settled in the exercise of His own authority," and of which He has given account to no man.'[1]

2. But to obviate this disappointment about the kingdom for the Jews, there is to be ample compensation. After having relegated the knowing of the times and the seasons to a subordinate and less important place, He gives forth His great and gracious promise, and sets it over against their dream —'But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you.' It might have been a dangerous thing suddenly to dissipate their fondly-cherished delusion, had He not been able to put something unspeakably better, and more intensely fascinating, in its place. Were they looking for recognition and place and power and influence in this imaginary, and, in a measure, carnal kingdom? He supersedes it all, and makes it to pass away into complete oblivion, by the promise of the Great Gift of the Spirit, and the communication of His Divine Power. A great and well-known statesman, and one, too, who had Jewish blood in his veins, has said—'Man is only great when he acts from the passion, never irresistible but when he appeals to the imagination.'[2] This was abundantly proved true in the experience of these men on that eventful and epoch-making day. This promise of the Spirit of Power acted like a charm. It chased away their little selfish notions, and girded them with an enthusiasm and inspiration that made their manhood altogether new. They were seized and possessed and taken captive

[1] *From Jerusalem to Antioch*, Dr. Dykes, p. 15.
[2] *Coningsby*.

by a new, overmastering conviction, which kindled and fired their imagination, so as to carry everything before it. It appears incredible, and, according to the world's estimate of things, positively ludicrous, to couple the names of these eleven Jews with anything like Spiritual Power. They had given a deplorable illustration of their weakness and cowardice, only a few weeks before, when it was for their Lord and Master the very 'hour and the power of darkness'—and yet 'they all forsook Him and fled.' Surely these were strange vessels of weakness and infirmity into which the Risen Lord here promises to pour His Divine Strength! Yet it is an emphatic and impressive testimony that St. Paul was on right lines when he wrote—'But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are; that no flesh should glory in His presence.' These extraordinary men were, at the cross, weakness and fickleness personified; but, on 'the day in which He was taken up,' their weakness was transformed into miraculous and supernatural and Divine Strength, of a kind that has conquered the world, and made them its greatest benefactors and deliverers and friends. More than all the world's heroes and warriors, its kings and conquerors, its sages and philosophers and poets put together, these unlettered eleven men have wielded the Spirit of Power that has truly turned the world upside down; and shaped for these Christian centuries, and for the nations of the earth, their high mission and destiny.

They had sat at Christ's feet as His humble disciples, and they received that day the promise and pledge of Spiritual Power that was to make of them His apostles; and thus Divinely qualified and consecrated, the 'line' of these simple Galilean fishermen 'is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.' And to all who have the grace given them to enter into their secret, and follow out this great apostolic succession, is intrusted the high honour and privilege of continuing their holy and blessed service, for the edification of the Church, and the conversion of the world to Christ.

3. This Spirit of Power is promised for a great and holy purpose. It will become the Divine qualification for a high function. 'And ye shall be *witnesses* unto Me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.' These are strange words—witnesses *unto* Me, *for* Me, *of* Me. As He goes away into heaven, He leaves His character and mission in their charge and keeping. He had been branded as a deceiver—an impostor. 'This deceiver, when He was yet alive, said, After three days I will rise again.' There were two impostures dreaded by those in high places. They hoped they had effectually crushed the first by means of the cross. But they were in terror lest there should be a second and worse imposture concerning His resurrection. And so these men had a great trust committed to them. They had to do nothing less than vindicate the integrity and innocence of a condemned and murdered man. They were to give evidence that His cross was empty, because ere He died He was able in triumph to exclaim—'It is finished.' And then they were to give

evidence that the grave was empty, for His finished work on earth was accepted in heaven. These men had amplest qualification faithfully and honestly to discharge the function of witnesses. They were on the spot. The facts of the case were familiar to them. It was no mere second-hand, hearsay evidence they had to retail. 'We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen.' For they had lived through the memorable events that were called in question, and were able to give the true and only possible explanation of Christ's death and rising again. And their Lord and Master assures them that they are to 'be endued with power from on high' to give their testimony fearlessly and faithfully; and are to be gifted with living tongues of fire to give force to their words, and render their evidence convincing and effectual.

The scope of their testimony was to be world-wide —'unto the uttermost part of the earth.' But there was to be method and plan in their working. They were to begin just where He left off, and take up the enterprise at the point which was virtually the moral and spiritual centre and heart of the world— 'beginning at Jerusalem.' The Master here enjoined them to act the part of a skilful physician who has to grapple with some malignant disease. He must reach its seat and fight it in its own domain. Or like a wise general, commissioned by his Queen and country to subdue some rebellious race, he will first concentrate his energies on reducing their citadel and capturing their stronghold. It was in Jerusalem the Lord of Glory was rejected and condemned, crowned with thorns and crucified, as an impostor and malefactor. Surely it was meet and fitting that

the Gospel of 'Christ and Him crucified' should first be proclaimed on Jerusalem streets, and to Jerusalem sinners. It was glorious, gracious, generous. It was like Christ, and worthy of Him. And it gave assurance that He was mighty to save. Not only was He willing and able to save the men and women who had said—'Away with Him, crucify Him, crucify Him,' but He was anxious they should get the foremost offer—the very first invitation to the Saviour's pardoning mercy and grace. The blood can cleanse the red-stained hands that drove home the nails; and the very greatest, guiltiest, furthest-gone sinner in all Jerusalem may be saved.

4. The water-baptism of John at the beginning was distinctly linked on to the fire-baptism of Jesus at the end. These bewildered men were now on the very threshold of this sacred endowment. They were being inspired for their apostolic work by the great words which have become the very charter of the Christian Church, and the title-deeds of a redemption that warrants and compels us to claim and win and evangelise the world for Christ. They were to 'tarry' in Jerusalem, and wait for the promise of the Father and the baptism of the Holy Ghost. Meanwhile their attitude was to be one of patient expectation. Nor would it be long in coming. They were to expect it—'not many days hence.' And when this new Spiritual Power came upon them, they had their witnessing work prescribed for them in Jerusalem and Judea and Samaria and the ends of the earth. How faithfully this Divine programme was carried out, 'the Acts of the Apostles,' otherwise called 'the Acts of the Holy Ghost,' give abundant and blessed testimony.

III. *The Closing Scene.* The last words have been spoken. There has been all through this never-to-be-forgotten parting interview an unspeakable look and tone of loving tenderness. No doubt the hearts of the disciples anew burned within them. At length He proposes to adjourn; 'and He led them out as far as to Bethany.' It was now late in the afternoon —we may be permitted to imagine—of a sweet, sunny, summer day. The sun was sinking low in the distant west. In quiet and silence the little group of Galilean peasants walk through the streets of Jerusalem. They become an object of interest and curiosity and wonder to the passers-by, who make way for them to pass, but turn and look and speculate as to 'whereunto this should grow.' Onward these mysterious pilgrims move, slowly indeed, and with a certain quiet and imposing dignity, with the Risen Lord at their head. They take the path through Gethsemane—of sacred memory—and climb the gentle slopes of Olivet. And there, in some fitly-chosen, quiet, sequestered spot, He paused, and turned round, and 'lifted up His hands, and blessed them.' 'And it came to pass while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and was carried up into heaven.' As they listened in awe and silence to His gracious words of benediction, and gazed, reassured and satisfied, on the outstretched hands that had in them still the print of the nails, slowly and in silence His body began to move heavenward. The law of gravitation was superseded. 'While they beheld, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight.' On that white cloud He rode as in a chariot, to find His way back, after 'He had by Himself purged our sins,' to sit down 'on the right hand of the Majesty on high.'

His last look was love; His last word was benediction. Those uplifted, nail-pierced hands bless the disciples and the Church and the world as He enters glory; and that blessing has been wafted down the ages, and is lighting on us now, 'on whom the ends of the world are come.' May it inspire and burden every one of us this day, and lay heavy on heart and conscience our responsibility for the fulfilment of our Risen and Ascended Lord's great apostolic commission—'All authority hath been given unto Me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I commanded you: and lo, I am with you all the days, even unto the end of the world!'

XI

WAITING FOR THE PROMISE

'Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is nigh unto Jerusalem, a sabbath day's journey off. And when they were come in, they went up into the upper chamber, where they were abiding; both Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James the son of Alphæus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas the son of James. These all with one accord continued steadfastly in prayer, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brethren. . . . And there was a multitude of persons gathered together, about a hundred and twenty.—Acts i. 12-15 (R.V.).

THE interval of ten days between the Saviour's going and the Spirit's coming has ever since been memorable and historical. The great forty days immediately preceding have a romantic and mystic interest associated with them, because their Risen Lord and Leader still companied with His disciples. But when He had gone, and while as yet the promised Comforter had not come, they were truly orphaned and desolate of heart. It is an instructive and much-needed lesson for the Church to learn, that God can afford to carry on His work with calm repose and quiet leisure. With Him there is no undue or undignified haste or impatience. The Christ was in no hurry to go, and the Spirit was in no hurry to come; and both the forty days, and the ten, have had their special purpose to serve, and have been

rich and fruitful in results. Had it been man, and not God, that was managing this great business, it might have been very different. This solemn pause might have been regarded with impatience as wasted time and lost opportunity, when the very bread and water of life were now ready and waiting, and the great hungry, starving world perishing for want of them. But, 'My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the LORD.'

For, indeed, any such headlong and impetuous action would have been the surest sign of unfitness to undertake and carry through this great and holy enterprise. It was precisely at this stage that patience needed to have its perfect work in these disciples, that they might be perfect and entire, wanting nothing. For it must be remembered they had been passing through a marvellous experience within a few short weeks. One event after another had been working a mighty upheaval in the entire circle of their religious convictions, making confusion for the time only worse confounded. Early one autumn morning, in company with two friends, I stood watching and waiting at the top of the far-famed Gemmi Pass. We had been taught to expect just here one of the most magnificent views in the whole of Switzerland. You can imagine the intensity of our disappointment when we found the whole scene enveloped in a mantle of thick, damp, grey mist. We lingered regretfully, and tried to make the best of our misfortune by imagining what it might have been ; when, quite suddenly and unexpectedly, a gentle breeze fanned our cheeks. Then as we turned and looked, far up the heights the lazy, reluctant mist began to trail itself away, and Alpine peaks in jagged, broken out-

line stood out, snow-clad, against the sky. Gradually the grey mantle, curling and twisting in beautiful serpentine contortions, was chased along the mountain flanks, and at length swept away down into the Rhone valley. All the while the sun was struggling hard to help the wind, and soon we beheld a scene baffling description, for it had a look like fairyland. Far up, the crags and peaks were tipped as if with gold; and, dotting the hillsides, and down into the valleys, there were patches of sunshine competing with broken fragments of the lingering mist; and soon the green fields and trees and red roof tiles and church spires and the awful piles of rugged rock began to show, till the last belt of vapour was charmed away, and all the disjointed, scattered, broken bits of loveliness were reconciled and gathered into one—'a thing of beauty and a joy for ever.' And just such must have been the impressions of the disciples. Their views of religious truth had undergone a complete revolution. Only when, 'as they were looking, He was taken up,' did the full and complete and perfect harmony of things appear. For a time they were like the half-healed man in the gospel, who only saw 'men as trees walking.' But now the mist has cleared away. The cross and the resurrection and the ascension are all in line. They begin to comprehend for the first time the true relation between 'the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow.' Only now have they grasped for themselves the secret of the gospel message they are to give to the world. It is surely meet they should pause and wait and pray for the promised Spirit of Power that shall qualify them for this sacred function. 'The true preparation,' says Dr. Dykes, 'for each onward

step in God's kingdom is within us, not without. It is to hearts that are gathered well into themselves, exercised upon the past sayings of God, roused to wait on Him for new blessings, and quick with patient, resolute desire, and the calm strength of faith, that the Spirit comes.'

1. Great interest gathers round the 'vision of angels' on Olivet, and the message they spake as the disciples were gazing up into heaven after their ascended Lord. These were very likely the same 'two angels in white' whom Mary saw 'sitting, the one at the head, and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain.' They are represented in Scripture as young and strong and human-faced—God's white-robed, white-winged, swift messengers. It must have been to them an honourable and welcome errand to hover over scenes so sacred, and to minister to their great Master as well as His sorrowing disciples. For they had glad tidings to tell, both at the empty grave and on the hill of Olivet. It was theirs gently to chide Mary for needlessly looking down, and the eleven men of Galilee for needlessly looking up. In both cases the look was loving, and genuinely sympathetic and loyal. But it was idle and meaningless in the circumstances. Yet it was human nature; and it is a question if the angel-nature could fully understand, or make allowance enough for it. I have watched a widowed mother sitting and wistfully gazing through her tears far out to sea, long after the ship was lost to sight, and waving her little white flag in fond farewell to her boy. You may be sure the Lord of angels and men will not despise such devotion, even if it is fanciful

sometimes and full of dreams. But the angels had good reason to tell the men to stop star-gazing, for, said they, 'this same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven.'

Thus were forged on Olivet the very latest links in the golden chain of the Gospel story. It is for these disciples the supreme and unquestionable evidence of two heavenly witnesses, who stand forward to verify and confirm their own experience. They give clear and unqualified assurance of the destination of the Lord when He left the disciples—it was 'into heaven.' They also testify that He will come again as they have seen Him go. And perhaps the greatest wonder of all is this—what He was and is He shall for ever continue to be—'this same Jesus.' The disciples are able to make good that He was the same after the cross as before it, and the assertion of the angels prolongs His unchanging continuity to the end of time. Earth and men have lost Him, meanwhile, and He has gone within the veil as the great High Priest and Advocate with the Father, but 'unto them that look for Him shall He appear a second time, without sin, unto salvation.'

'And they worshipped him,' St. Luke says in his Gospel narrative I wonder if it was only when the cloud hid Him from their gaze that they began fully to realise His Divine Glory and Eternal Sonship! Of how many things in this world is it true that we never truly prize them or know their value, till after we have lost them! Christ has been to these men the 'Friend that sticketh closer than a brother.' He was so very near and so very human, that his Divinity was as it were screened and darkened and over-

shadowed. But now in the dim unmeasured distance He is better seen and better known. Faith is now able to scan the true proportions of His Person, as well as His Work. And thus, ere they leave the spot, impelled by a heaven-born instinct, as the true meaning of the Incarnation flashed like lightning into their very souls, they lowly and reverently bend the knee in adoration and worship and prayer. Christ brought heaven to earth at His coming, and has taken earth back to heaven at His going; and now the awful gulf has over it a bridge for man to find his way to God. At first he trembles and hesitates lest he do wrong in paying homage and worship to a man. But now He grows and greatens into the God-man. And so, when, in a moment, it all grows real and true and beautiful, these men are amazed and ashamed at not having seen it sooner. It is no wonder that 'they worshipped Him.' It would have been a wonder if they had not!

2. But the great discovery which had made them worshippers of their newly ascended Lord and King also inspired them with a holy purpose and resolve. They must away back to the city, and communicate the great, glad tidings to the faithful friends awaiting their return. The fact that they determined to go back at once to Jerusalem was proof of their full appreciation of the hopefulness of the situation. For there was undoubtedly great risk in doing so Had they been disappointed and disheartened with the sudden translation of their Lord to heaven, they might have agreed to disband, and quietly and secretly find their way back to Galilee, as men mindful mostly of their own safety, and half ashamed of the forlorn hope that had ended only in miserable failure

and disappointment and desertion. They had still left for themselves a pathway for retreat and return to their old manner of life among the nets and fishing-boats. But they were not now in the mood for such a cowardly and inglorious retreat. It rather looked as if they were determined resolutely to cut themselves adrift from any such possibility as this. It was a bold and daring determination. They had come to the parting of the ways. And right nobly and fearlessly they made their choice. Like heroes they nailed their colours to the mast. They challenged the hate and malignity of the men who slew their Master, and responded to an overmastering and compelling sense of obligation. They must needs give implicit obedience to the marching orders of their great Commander. Thus they take the step that compels them to break for ever with their past. The time was when they arose, one after another, and left all, and followed Him. They are now to confirm and enhance that great renunciation. To most men their decision might seem little short of madness. Yet they were animated and sustained by a magnificent superhuman courage and confidence. The Lord they loved and trusted, and whom they had just seen go into heaven, was in spirit by their side; and they go back fearlessly and without a moment's hesitation to the place where wicked hands had spilt His blood, to wait for the Spirit of Power, that would amply fit them to begin even at Jerusalem the work of the world's conversion.

And they returned with *great joy*. Since they had been able to assure themselves of the reality of His resurrection, they had gradually come to lose their woe-begone look of sadness. Before that they had

been like the shipwrecked mariners whom St. Paul tried to comfort and helped to save, to whom 'neither sun nor stars in many days appeared.' They must often have reminded themselves, and one another, of their Master's great words of warning and consolation —'Verily, verily, I say unto you, that ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice; and ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy. . . . And ye now therefore have sorrow; but I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you.' They had been living through the darkest chapters of this experience first; and gradually things had come to look brighter, and were full of bewildering hopefulness and expectancy. But it is only now, as they return without their Lord to Jerusalem, that they are filled with a full and overflowing flood of unspeakable joy. It was as when the LORD turned again the captivity of Zion. They were like them that dream. The one explanation of this new-found joy was their knowledge of the fact, that their Lord and their King and their Friend had taken His place at the right hand of the Father. And so, though the fortunes of the little company were at the lowest; though they could only count on the doubtful sympathy and support of a mere handful of obscure and timid men and devoted women, who were virtually in hiding for fear of the Jews; though the church, and the state authorities, and the fickle crowd, and the rough Roman soldiers were all in combination to crush the new sect that clung to the crucified Nazarene; though they were taking their lives in their hand, and championing a dangerous and doubtful enterprise—yet the joy of the Lord was their strength. It reminds us of the cour-

ageous spirit of Martin Luther long centuries after, when, in reply to the warning of Spalatin he said—'Go and tell your master, that even should there be as many devils in Worms as there are tiles on the housetops, still I would enter it.' The men who are certified and satisfied that Jesus Christ sits on the throne and holds the reins in His great Right Hand of Power, are fit for anything. If they fear God, and have faith in Him, they need fear none beside. They can defy earth and hell. These eleven men returning to Jerusalem with great joy, are the pioneers of a rejoicing and conquering Christianity. 'They joy before Thee according to the joy in harvest, and as men rejoice when they divide the spoil.' 'If God be for us, who can be against us?'

3. When the disciples reached the city they naturally and instinctively sought the upper room. It may have been by this time late on the Thursday evening—the ascension day. Possibly the company had gathered in the dark, and were waiting, and wondering at the new turn things had lately taken. And lo! suddenly the door opens and the eleven enter. A remarkable change has passed upon their faces. A new animation and eager excitement have taken possession of them. They have news to communicate of the greatest interest and importance, but they hardly know how to begin to unfold their great secret. Once divulged, however, it is soon the common glad possession of the whole company. And it fills them all with a holy and unspeakable joy. But it is the time, and they are all in the spirit, for the evening sacrifice of worship. And so, on bended knee, in profoundest adoration and reverence, the hundred and twenty say their prayers for the first

time in the great name of Jesus. It takes a little while ere they get used to it, but it grows upon them, and becomes more and more real and blessed in the exercise. It was their joy formerly to have Him near them, and to be sure of His fellowship; but now He is more and better to them, just because He is so far away. When these sincere and devout men and women came to put the Risen Lord in His rightful place in heaven, then everything else came to fit in and balance itself in true proportion. The Christ on the throne gave a new grandeur to the Christ on the cross. All the events they thought so ill of at the time, now settle into their subordinate and preconcerted place, and contribute their share to make redemption-work complete and perfect, and the Redeemer glorious and great. The same spirit which animated the eleven on Olivet now took possession of the entire company in the upper room. The Divine Glory of the Man Christ Jesus dominated their entire conception of His character and mission and work, and so they did Him homage, and humbly worshipped Him then and there.

One feels as if it were little short of sacrilege to intrude upon these devoutly exercised worshippers. And yet it forms such an epoch in their religious life, and such a memorable and well-defined landmark in their spiritual history, that great life-lessons for the Church in all times are taught and learnt in the thrilling story of that upper room. When Ethelred, the Saxon king of Northumberland, invaded Wales, and was about to give battle to the Britons, he observed near the enemy a host of unarmed men. He inquired who they were and what they were doing. He was told they were the monks of Bangor praying

for the success of their countrymen. 'Then,' said the heathen prince, 'they have begun the *fight* against us: attack them *first*!' If we can withdraw the curtain, and get a real glimpse into the transactions of those ten wonderful days, we may discover and measure the mighty secret Spiritual force that has ruled the world ever since; and learn how frail men like ourselves, have been privileged to wield it. For do we not find that they had in hand the work carried on in later days by the monks of Bangor? They had already begun the battle, and were fighting on their knees. But what sent them to their knees, in the first instance at least, was the testimony of the disciples, and through them of the angels, concerning the Divine and heavenly majesty of this same Jesus. And we can imagine them, in the pauses of their worship and adoration, recalling strange, mystic, and at the time meaningless words spoken by Himself when He was yet with them. But the dark sayings lingered in their memories and had crystallised themselves in their hearts; and now they have the clue and the key that unlocks and explains and reconciles and harmonises them all. They understand now the meaning of His words—'Hitherto ye have asked nothing in My Name: ask and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.' For their old Jewish conception of sacrifice and priesthood has been all fulfilled in Christ, and with Him now in the heavenlies for them, the types and symbols and shadows are waxing old, and are ready to vanish away. And so too, when He said—'It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send Him unto you.' All this was dark and enigmatical at

the time, but now it has taken tangible shape and beautiful form, in that they lovingly rejoice in the Redeemer's going, and wait expectantly for the Comforter's promised coming. And so, all through the terrible stress and strain — the suspense and anxiety—of the ten waiting days in that sacred and familiar upper room in Jerusalem, they were thoughtfully and meekly sitting, like Mary, at the great Master's feet, and learning profound and true lessons in experimental theology and Spiritual Insight and Power, which became the crowning qualification for apostolic ministry and Christian testimony that has made of them faithful witnesses for Christ, and genuine benefactors to the world.

4. The patient waiting was interrupted by an incident somewhat unaccountable and strange. Peter makes a sudden proposal that the vacant place in the apostleship, 'from which Judas by transgression fell,' should immediately be filled up. I confess that it has long been with me a very doubtful question as to whether Peter's conduct here can be vindicated or commended. From what we know of him it can be very easily explained. It was just like the man. It must have been for him no ordinary trial to wait, and do nothing but wait, for ten long, weary days. The impetuous and impulsive disciple of times gone by must in this crisis of the church's training and discipline reveal and betray his true feverish disposition. We miss any trace of Divine warrant for the action he took. When the Lord Himself had gone away without filling up the blank, and when they were distinctly and emphatically enjoined to 'tarry' for the Spirit of Power from on high, there was no need or call for haste in business so important as this. All

the more was there necessity for deliberate postponement in order to get the Divine guidance when the Holy Ghost was given. Peter's faults and weaknesses are such as 'almost lean to virtue's side,' and his rash impulses are generous and magnanimous enough; but it appears to me he took this work in hand unbidden, and all unconsciously, and with the purest and best intentions, outran his apostolic commission. The whole incident is pathetic and painful in the extreme. It presents harrowing details concerning the fate of one whom we would all be glad enough to forget, since he has gone to his own place. And it also offers the touching spectacle of the disciple who denied his Lord with oaths and curses, but was graciously forgiven and taken back to confidential service and fellowship, proposing to elect a successor to the disciple who betrayed Him, and became a castaway! You may have seen an ugly gap or gash or scar in some scene of loveliness, and you wonder how it came to be there, and why it has been permitted to continue; but when they tell you it is a waymark of the lurid lightning and destroying thunderbolt of heaven, by which brave men met their doom; and that they thought it best to leave it so —you are reconciled, and contented that the awful breach should remain. And so it seems meet that this awful scar on the mountain side of time should be left alone, and that Judas should have no successor— or if it must needs be that the mystic number of the twelve shall be maintained, and the empty place made good, then there is one man, and only one in all his generation, worthy of the honour, who, in making valid his credentials and claims, could say— 'And last of all He was seen of me also, as of one

born out of due time'—Saul of Tarsus, who is also called Paul, the great apostle of the Gentiles.

5. There can be no question it must have been the strained tension of prolonged, patient waiting that suggested the election of a new apostle. We can only guess at what stage it may have taken place. But we may easily imagine them restored to their waiting attitude, after this formal piece of business is done with, and led to think and say—'Surely the last obstacle is at length taken out of the way. We may with confidence expect His coming now.' But the appointed days drag their slow length along. To men it is sometimes given to 'live a twelvemonth in an hour.' Brief and memorable moments in human experience may be crowded with consciously overwhelming intensity and energy and activity. Here it is simply and exclusively doing nothing, and having nothing to do, till something else has first been accomplished in which their active efforts can have no possible share or place. It is often a hundred times harder to wait on God, than it is to do difficult and trying work for Him. It may sometimes be a greater and nobler thing by far to be the *picture*, than to be the *painter*: as was the case when Albrecht Dürer painted the 'Folded hands' of his friend Franz Knigstein—the emblem and attitude of submission and resignation in view of deep and bitter disappointment regarding the dream of his life—that he too should be a painter. This passive, enduring, waiting, suffering side of life is essentially Christian and Christlike; and the deep soul-exercise of both hope and patience which it called forth, and made beautiful, has been instrumental in building up the character, and enriching and elevating the entire life.

For the severe and protracted discipline involved in waiting on God for His gift of Power, led to the development of true inwardness in spiritual life. It threw them back on themselves. They had to go to the very depths of their resources, and draw upon them in their great emergency. We might be safe in saying that they lived ten years during these ten days. They were sharply shaken out of their Jewish hankerings and prejudices concerning the kingdom, and were thrown back on great first principles. Their altered conception concerning the Jewish Messiah must have turned the Old Testament Scriptures into a new and wonderful book. And while none of the Gospels were yet written, the substance of them was cherished in their memories and hearts. Doubtless His great words and deeds were rehearsed and verified and interpreted in the light of their fresh discoveries and experiences. They continued to attend the ordinary devotions and services of the Jewish temple. Yet there must have been a great gulf fixed between those who were in charge—armed with priestly functions and prerogatives—and themselves. They had now new light by which to read between the lines, and the priestly function on earth was overshadowed and eclipsed by their connection and communion with the great new Priest behind the veil. And, strangest mystery of all, and seeming contradiction of their truest spiritual instincts and sympathies—the men who were first and foremost in the service of the temple had been the murderers of their Lord!

The time of suspense and waiting and long delay was a gracious discipline. It served the purpose of humbling and emptying them. Their own sense of

weakness and helplessness assured them that their only help was in Jehovah, the Maker of heaven and earth. The very exercise of patient waiting strengthened their faith and purified their hope. It made an unseen Saviour more real: and He was now to them the connecting link between their human weakness and the Divine Power they were waiting for. He Himself had taught them to pray, and encouraged them to persevere. 'And when their hearts are purged through this trial, and their faith is sure of its ground, and their hope has ripened into patient expectation, and their waiting, longing souls are ready for Him—then, and not till then, the Holy Ghost will come, and come abundantly.'[1] For 'they that wait on the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not faint.'

The secret of the possession of Spiritual Power depends on this patient waiting upon God. It is made a complaint in these last days that we have lost this power, and that its great secret needs to be rediscovered. Ours is a great age for invention and discovery. We are busy worming out the secrets of nature, and turning them into power. Yet men tell us of great secrets that have been lost to the world—in mechanics and art and science and medicine—because those interested carried the secret with them to their graves. Shall it have to be said that in our time we are losing the secret of power in the church, because we dishonour the Holy Spirit in our preaching, and fail to give Him scope and opportunity

[1] Dr. Dykes.

for His mighty working in poor human hearts and sin-stained lives? And are we to be so busy and eager and preoccupied with this present evil world and its distracting entanglements and engagements, that we have neither the time nor the inclination to wait for the promise? Or is our excuse to be the miserable subterfuge that we must care for forms and outward organisation and arrangement, and then have not the call or the mission to wait and pray? We are familiar with the new cry—'Back to Christ.' And it is good and true and worthy, if only we understand its full significance. For it implies that we shall cease from man, and disown confidence in any arm of flesh, and leave behind us every vain imagination that would exalt the church, or the ordinances, or the sacraments, or the ministry, or any outward force whatever, into the sphere reserved exclusively for the exercise of the Power and working of the Holy Ghost: and, finding our way back to Calvary and Olivet and the upper room in Jerusalem, shall there tarry and linger and wait on our bended knees, until we be endued with Power from on high—'that we may be filled with all the fulness of God.'

XII

THE DAY OF PENTECOST

'And when the day of Pentecost was now come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared unto them tongues parting asunder, like as of fire; and it sat upon each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.'—ACTS ii. 1-4 (R.V.).

THE ten days of inactivity and waiting had not been at all lost or wasted. They served to discipline the little company of believers into holy tranquillity and restfulness. They had lived through weeks of excitement and never-ending new surprises. A time of quiet and calm was wanted for them in which to review this troubled, exciting season, and grasp the situation. Their having to wait thus long was a needed lesson in humility, and must have made them keenly sensible of their absolute dependence. They could not force the hand of God. Even in the holy exercise of praying and waiting and trusting, the doctrine of the Divine Sovereignty must be accounted for and acknowledged. Nine days' waiting was a kind of sacred, spiritual apprenticeship, and preparation, and insight into the heart of God, and into their own; and, with heart and will subdued and tamed—'like child of mother weaned,' they were in

the true attitude to receive the heavenly baptism when the day of Pentecost was fully come.

And indeed, while the vision tarried and they waited for it, there must have been a disposition to associate the two events together. 'If not before,' they may have whispered, 'at the very latest it will happen on the day of Pentecostal feast.' For remember, it was a great occasion for them. The city of Jerusalem was being crowded with strangers intent on celebrating this ancient feast of gladness. There were fifty eventful days between the Passover night in Egypt and the giving of the law from Sinai—including the great emancipation and exodus of the Hebrew nation, the crossing of the sea, and the wilderness journey, till they came to Horeb, the mount of God. And there—after the awful memories of their last night in Egyptian bondage, when the angel of death went through the land and smote the first-born, only missing the Hebrew homes that had the shed blood on the door-post and the lintel—God manifested Himself, initiating and inaugurating the new dispensation of Divine law and order, of which Moses was the champion and the prophet. It was an awful revelation of law, and sin, and grace. The sanctions of Divine Majesty enhanced the proclamation of '*The ten words*,' and the thunder and the fire and the voice awed and solemnised the assembled tribes of Israel. And so there is a fine and fitting analogy between the old and the new. For, on the cross, Christ our Passover has been sacrificed and slain for His church and people; and fifty days later there is ushered in the gospel dispensation in all its grandeur,as identified with the Risen Lord's ascension and the gift of the Holy Ghost. Of old God spake,

and the mountain burned with fire. It is the same God in the new time as in the old. There is something awful to hear and something terrible to see. The law-giver of Sinai has to stand aside, 'for the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ.' And yet there is harmony between the work of Moses and that of Christ, since He hath magnified the law and made it honourable. And thus the sinner who believes in Christ discovers the gospel of forgiveness, and is justified, in face and front of the Divine Law; while this gifted Holy Ghost, quickening, and sanctifying, and making all things new, brings him 'under law to Christ.' Moses wrote the law on marble tables; the Holy Spirit writes it on human hearts.

I. Let us linger for a moment, reverently and devoutly, on the threshold of this great, 'far-off, Divine event.' Next to 'the Tragedy of Good Friday,' it is positively the greatest fact in the world's history. And as Jews, the hundred and twenty in the upper room must have been absorbed with holy anxiety and hopeful expectation, regarding its possibilities and issues. For Pentecost was one of the great and welcome feasts of what we may call the Jewish 'Christian Year.' The Passover was named the feast of the first ripe corn—the beginning of the barley-harvest. But Pentecost celebrated the close and ingathering of the wheat-harvest. It was a season of national gladness and rejoicing and thanksgiving, and formed the landmark of an agricultural people's happy harvest-home; and if they were gifted with true sagacity and devout imagination, they would link the natural with the spiritual so closely together,

as to calculate on the Pentecostal gift of Spiritual Power forming the Divine pledge and prophecy of the completion of Christ's mystical body, and the ingathering of the nations of the world to the great harvest-home in heaven.

And we know how deeply this conception impressed itself on the consciousness of the early Christian church. For this Jewish feast of Pentecost was translated into Whit- or White-Sunday. We in these last days, and especially in this cold northern latitude, have come to associate the season more directly with the world than with the church ; and it has for us rather a commercial than a spiritual interest and importance. But in the church's earliest and best days it was otherwise. For the converts from heathenism who were candidates for admission into the Christian church by baptism, were accustomed to dress themselves in white garments, and publicly make confession of surrender and devotion to Christ, on that, to them, ever memorable *White*-Sunday in the history of their religious experience.

What a marvellous and miraculous transformation must have overtaken these first friends and followers of the Crucified One, in the course of these short seven weeks! On the morning of the resurrection the women—always truest in their affection, and foremost in their manifestation of devotion—found their way early to the sepulchre, 'while it was yet dark.' But they brought spices with them to anoint the body of their dead Friend, and were absolutely unprepared to welcome their Risen Redeemer. The men were drawn to the grave in the garden, only by their common sorrow and sense of sore bereavement. Theirs was only 'the hope that keeps alive despair.'

Two of them wandered into the country in a spirit of aimless, hopeless, joyless melancholy. The little company was broken up. The holy and tender bond of cohesion was severed. Their energy and enthusiasm had clean gone. Thomas sulked and stayed at home, and nursed his morbid doubt and disappointment. Under the terrible shock and strain of defeat and dismay, they lost heart, and all their courage and mutual confidence and high resolve was dissipated and melted away like snow in summer winds. They were completely humiliated and paralysed and broken down. It seemed as if the outcome of the toil and sacrifice and endurance of a long lifetime had suddenly gone to pieces before their eyes, and left them bankrupt and penniless, and without a friend or comforter. Wreck and ruin stared them in the face, and 'mocked them in their misery.'

But they came to make the glad discovery—if ever mortal men did—that 'man's extremity is God's opportunity.' The strange development of events held them spellbound. They were drawn out into the Divine confidence and sympathy. They felt themselves mixed up with His great purposes, and included in His plans. And so it came to pass that during the wistful, waiting days, there had been a full muster of the friends of Jesus. About one hundred and twenty men and women held together in prolonged exercises of conference and prayer. And they continued united and unanimous to the very close of that great prayer-meeting. There were no jealousies or misunderstandings or heart-burnings. They were full of faith and hope and charity all through. And what intense concentration! What a contrast between the morning of Easter Sunday and

the morning of Pentecost! 'Thomas was not with them when Jesus came,' but you may depend on it he never missed a meeting, and was with them when the Holy Ghost came. One and all had now gathered together. And they must have begun at an early hour; for Peter incidentally explains, and defends from a false construction, the excitement that was manifest so soon as nine o'clock in the morning. Perhaps they had an all-night meeting. Did they not gradually begin to feel as if the very atmosphere were surcharged with spiritual electricity, and the great fire-storm ready to break over their heads? And so 'when the day of Pentecost was fully come they were all with one accord in one place.'

It may be a profitable exercise for us to note the intimate connection between the Divine promise and men's prayers. It might appear as if the promise superseded the necessity for the prayer. But it is emphatically the other way. The promise is the warrant for prayer; and prayer is the condition of its fulfilment. 'I the LORD have spoken it, and I will do it. Thus saith the Lord GOD, I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them.' And while we accept the force of this truth generally, it has a specific reference to the case before us now: for our Lord Himself has stated it in a form the most fascinating and tender—'If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children: how much more shall your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?' And we may all take encouragement from this praying company, to wait on God in the union of believing hearts and voices, when we find this great warrant and promise written over against it—'I say

unto you, that if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father which is in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.'

II. Two signs, in their own way sacramental, were associated with the gift of Spiritual Power that day. In the conscious experience of these waiting worshippers, they first heard something, and then saw something. Evidently they were at a loss in their efforts to give a minute and detailed description of the awful scene. They tried to measure and compare it with the earthly things that seemed most nearly and closely to resemble it. Yet they cautiously and carefully give their impressions, and only say it reminded them of certain familiar things, and was like them. Then we must make allowance for the fact that they were not mere spectators. They were themselves involved in this supernatural and Divine communication. And then it came so very suddenly, and without the faintest warning. Possibly too, it did not take long time altogether. Nevertheless these great sacramental signs and symbols were graven on the rock of their memories as with an iron pen, and shall be treasured in their heart of hearts for evermore.

1. The first sign met the ear. 'And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.' This sign was in varied form the token of Divine manifestation. It was a thundering voice to Moses, and a great strong wind and earthquake to Elijah, and a rushing heavenly hurricane to the disciples in the upper room. It suggests irresistible

and overwhelming force ; and the movement is downward, earthward, manward—a gracious bestowment from God's own hand. This is the wind or breath or spiritual life that was invoked over the bones—very many and very dry—by Ezekiel in the valley of vision. It is the sign and token and symbol for spiritual life and supernatural power and Divine energy. And it comes down from above. The vain dream of spontaneous generation has had to be given up. We depend on God as absolutely for the spiritual as we do for the natural life. There is in both the image and superscription of God, and they bear the very seal and hall-mark that are Divine. The man who imagines he can, by his own human effort and endeavour, assert and realise for himself the thing called spiritual life, does not understand what death and life really mean. In view of the mass of vague and ill-defined and spurious teaching that prevails on this most vital and important subject in our day, it is much to be desiderated that this great page in Scripture, and this great event in history, should be constantly and prominently before the church, that its teaching and lessons may be emphasised and solemnly enforced. 'It is the Spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing.' 'Come from the four winds, O Breath!'

2. The second sign appealed to the eye. 'And there appeared unto them cloven tongues as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.' The emblem of fire is familiar and common in Scripture history. It represents the quickening and life-giving energy and purifying and consecrating power of the Holy Ghost. John the Baptist prophesied—'He shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost and with fire.' And that promise

was now finding its solemn and awful fulfilment. Among Pagan races there have been many who were fire-worshippers. They were led to regard it as the very embodiment of the principle of life and living energy and power. It was the perversion and prostitution of a great truth which led men to cause their children 'to pass through the fire to Moloch.' Even in the world of nature this great lesson is touchingly taught and illustrated. For in midwinter here, and in the Arctic regions much more, the fires of life are quenched in death; and only gloom and desolation reign supreme. The springtime and summer rekindle the fires of God; and then comes a veritable resurrection of life—making everything young and green and fresh and beautiful again. And it is even so in the moral and spiritual world. The Fall of man brought with it the winter of the human soul. A great ice-age set in. All life withered and wasted away. The fire burned low and feeble; and the garden of the Lord was transformed into the 'waste howling wilderness.' Awful the ravages of sin and death in this fair world have been! But 'where sin abounded, grace did much more abound.' The mercy of God has rekindled the great Spiritual Fire; and it has burned and glowed in Christ—the life and light of men. He was lifted high on the cross, and is drawing all men unto Himself; and now that He is lifted high in heaven, and sits enthroned on the right hand of all Power, He has bestowed on a dead world the Holy Fire, and, in the words Peter employs to explain the situation that very day—'hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.'

But this Divine Fire, while essentially life-giving, has also a purifying function. 'For our God is a consuming

fire.' The fire, when it comes down, may have a holy mission of burning and destruction. All the rubbish and dross and waste must needs be consumed. 'The fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.' Yet this fiery furnace is not penal and vengeful. It is loving and merciful and gracious. It purges and purifies, and forms a stage in the process of consecration. Let us hail this awful baptism; and be content and thankful that everything about us unfit to stand the strain of this severe but blessed ordeal, shall pass away and for ever disappear, in the 'consuming fire' of God.

We must linger here to find a meaning in these 'tongues as of fire.' These darting, flickering spires of flame, as 'it sat on each of them,' were an investment of power—promised power—to qualify them to be Christ's faithful and true witnesses. It was the consecration of the tongue-power. And who can exaggerate the value of this power for good or for evil in the world? 'The tongue is a fire,' says St. James, 'a world of iniquity; so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.' It has been wisely remarked that far less is said in Scripture about the government of the church, than about the government of the temper and the tongue. And no wonder. For it appears here that the holy fire of heaven is needed to quench the very kindling of hell in a human tongue. And so we reach the very greatest seat and stronghold of power in this world. And we can only admire and adore, as we contemplate the wisdom of this heavenly plan that avails to capture and control and consecrate this tremendous force, and arm it to fulfil the Divine commission, with a tongue as of fire! In that

upper room they had come to the parting of the ways. Old altar-fires and bleeding sacrifices and ceremonial rites are to cease for ever. The whole Jewish dispensation has found its fulfilment in Christ and the cross. It has become antiquated and obsolete, and is already superseded. Its work is done. The new dispensation of the Spirit is being solemnly inaugurated. The message is peace and goodwill to men. The gospel is pardon and acceptance through the blood of His cross. And it is for all the world —'to every creature.' But does God ask—'Whom shall we send, and who will go for us?' Every disciple in that upper room rises and with lowly reverence responds—'Here am I, send me.' For, have not these clefted tongues as of fire sat on each one of them? The message is Divine, but the messenger must be human. There must be 'an interpreter, one among a thousand.' They lived through it all, and were 'eye-witnesses of His majesty.' And now, under the influence of the *breath* and the *fire*, they are accredited and endowed and licensed to preach the gospel. They have the truth of God to tell, and they have human tongues wherewith to tell it, to all the listening world; for they have been inspired and anointed and baptized for their heavenly mission, 'with tongues as of fire.'

III. But the essential element in the case still remains for serious consideration. Behind these most suggestive signs was the thing they signified—'And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost.' It is of the utmost importance that we recognise in this, and in this alone, the actual historical fulfilment of the promise of the Comforter. The signs preceding, and

the speaking with tongues following, were extraordinary and accidental, as well as miraculous. The temptation is to make too much of them. They appeal powerfully to the imagination. The scaffolding, which may be well enough in its own place, and for the time being, will mar the fair proportions of the building, and hide it from your view, if you leave it there after its work is done. And so, the real and permanent part in that day's transactions must be very jealously safeguarded, lest accidental associations shrivel and overcloud its true greatness, and tempt the church to mistake the shadow for the substance.

1. They were *filled*. It suggests to us the idea of a large number of vessels, all empty at first, and all filled at last. There is great variety among them. They are of all sorts and sizes. But up to the brim, to their very uttermost and largest capacity, they are filled, and they are full. In some cases men are represented as being 'filled' with the Holy Ghost, and in others as being 'full' of the Holy Ghost. 'The latter of these seems to indicate the more settled and habitual state: the former impresses one as implying a sudden and extraordinary incident.'[1] There is implied also the possibility—we might almost be safe to say the human necessity—of loss and leakage; and the most vitally important connection between continued filling and being kept full. And what untold possibilities of expansion and development are here! It is the meeting-place of the Divine and the human. The one is the jewel and the other the casket. All the Divine comes

[1] *The Spirit of Power*—by the Rev. T. Adamson, B.D.,—a very clear and suggestive statement of the whole case. It will be found both stimulating and helpful.

down to fill all the human, and possess and control and utilise all the faculties and activities and native energies of our being. 'The whole nature,' as Dr. Maclaren fitly and finely phrases it, 'filled with Him, will flame with new brilliance, like a bit of black carbon in a stream of electricity.'

A great reproach continues to lie at the door of the church, inasmuch as this Divine filling and fulness are sadly discredited, and put under human conditions and limitations that largely frustrate God's will and purpose concerning us. I know a man of great wealth, who lives in a fine mansion-house, surrounded by every element and influence fitted to make life a luxury and a delight; and yet that man is miserable, and drags out a dwarfed and wretched existence. He lives in two rooms, and denies himself the ordinary comforts and means of existence, lest he come to want and die in the workhouse. How many of us are guilty of living on a starvation allowance of spiritual provision, and shutting out great reaches of our being from the indwelling and full possession of the Holy Ghost? If only we open our doors and wait and pray, and give Him heart-room and house-room and undivided possession, our poor stunted souls shall enter into new life and liberty: our narrow and low ideals will yield to spiritual expansion and elevation; our lives will be rescued from heartless drudgery and despair; and instead, we shall become inly conscious of a new inspiration and a new enthusiasm and a new motive-power—'Filled with all the fulness of God.'

2. They were *all* filled. The only legitimate interpretation of this 'all,' is that which makes it inclusive of the whole hundred and twenty who waited in the

upper room. It is an arbitrary, and invidious, and utterly unwarranted contention, that would limit it as the exclusive privilege of the apostles. It might help the case of those who argue for a monopoly of grace and Spiritual Power, invested in the apostles, and inherited by those who arrogate for themselves the vain and presumptuous prerogative of apostolic succession. But it is nothing better than a pious fraud, and has no possible warrant or vindication here. The narrative excludes and condemns all such priestly pretensions, and gives this honour to all the saints. It confers this high dignity on every single, true member of the Christian church, and sanctions the royal priesthood of all believers. And indeed, if all that waited for the promise of the Father, and trusted the bare word of the Risen Redeemer, shared equally, and in the measure in which they were able to take it in, the baptism of the Holy Ghost, then they were not only warranted, but also committed and compelled, to be partners in the great enterprise of witnessing for their common Master.

3. And this raises a vexed question which has occasioned great dispute, and much bitterness of feeling in recent times—is the gift of the Spirit of Power at Pentecost, and throughout the Acts of the Apostles, distinct and different from the gift of the Spirit in the ordinary experience of conversion? It may be conceded that the waiting company of Christ's friends occupied an exceptional position. Previously they had some faint experience of the Spirit's presence and working, but the light and the truth were only very gradually dawning upon them. They were only ten days old, so to speak, in true Christian knowledge and experience. And they were kept

lingering on the very threshold of the new dispensation. It was to begin with them. In His fulness the Holy Ghost only came after Christ had gone; and these first disciples were only in a fit attitude of waiting and welcome, when they were able intelligently to worship the Crucified and Risen and Reigning Redeemer. But the fact remains that the *same* Spirit fell that *same* day on the Jerusalem crowd, and there was a great ingathering. We may be sure they did not need to wait for 'a second blessing,' or 'a second conversion.' Peter did not tell them to wait for a second baptism of the Spirit, after they had experienced the first. A careful study of the case brings out the fact that in the Acts of the Apostles it was a common occurrence for men and women to be converted and filled with the Spirit at the same time. The question of greatest practical interest for us all is this—How best to maintain the Spirit's fulness when we have been filled, and guard ourselves against the loss and waste that will rob us of this promised Spiritual Power; as well as how we may hope to recover it, if, through unbelief, or backsliding, or neglect, the Spirit has been grieved, and His fulness lost. 'They that wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.'

IV. Some few words remain to be spoken as to the *manifestation* of this new power—'And they began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.' Great multitudes, representing various distinct tongues and nationalities, though still retaining their Jewish sympathies, found their way to Jerusalem, to observe this feast. They were 'Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.' No doubt the noise had been heard outside, and

the vast crowd gathered in curiosity or anxiety. And now the consecrated members of the Christian church set themselves to work. All at once they undertake the task of evangelising the world—'beginning at Jerusalem.' Filled, all of them, with the Holy Ghost, and armed with tongues of fire, they go down into the streets and mingle with the throng. Suddenly their tongues are loosed, and they begin to talk in language the listeners understand. 'We do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.' These Galileans startled the world, and surprised themselves that day. They were brimful of the new doctrine concerning Jesus of Nazareth. And the Spirit gave them miraculous power to reach the nations of the world, and preach to them the good news of salvation. It was a blessed and fruitful day's work. It might have been regarded as the rehearsal of the world's conversion, and the pledge of the new song—'Thou art worthy . . . for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood, out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation.' The curse of Babel has been rolled back, and the scattered nations and races and clans are gathered into one at the cross of Calvary.

This manifestation of Spiritual Power was only provisional and temporary. But it has been prophetic. Men toil to master the languages of the world in the interests of commerce, and science, and literature, and civilisation. But it is a very remarkable compliment to Christianity, to find it acknowledged that the men who have been foremost in advancing the world's interests in heathen lands have been the missionaries of the cross. It may be taken for granted that, in the end of this nineteenth century,

there is hardly a tribe of earth's heathen millions that has not among them some Christian teacher, who is trying to reduce their rude language to written form, and to give them in their own mother-tongue the Bible and the Gospel. True, this great Christian commission has been shamefully neglected, and the church is only beginning to take to heart the Saviour's last command and promise. Could we only find our way back to that upper room, and linger for the breath, and the fire, and the fulness of the Holy Ghost, we might catch the holy contagion, and find ourselves invested with new purity and nobility of Christian character, and new intensity of devotion to the cause of God, and also to the cause of men, in this sorrow-laden, sin-stricken world. The Spirit of Holiness is the Spirit of Power. The Father has borne witness to the glory of the Risen Son of God, and if the Holy Ghost waits to fill us, it is that He, through us, may confirm that testimony, and bring a new revenue of praise to our Divine Redeemer. We are partners with the Holy Ghost in this high endeavour. 'We are witnesses of these things, and so is also the Holy Ghost.' There may be holy excitement that some men can mistake for wine; there may be that face of Stephen like the face of an angel; or there may be the burning, winged words of truth, that always speak well of Christ, and make His praise glorious. When we are in the Spirit and the Spirit is in us—filling us with His blessed fulness—we shall possess the power that stamps us as fit witnesses unto Christ, and renders our evidence incontrovertible.

'Blessed be the hour,' says William Arthur, 'when that tongue of fire descended from the Giver of speech into a cold world! Had it never come, my

mother might have led me, when a child, to see slaughter for worship, and I should have taught my little ones that stones were gods. "Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, who only doeth wondrous things! and blessed be His glorious name for ever: and let the whole earth be filled with His glory! Amen, and Amen!"'

XIII

THE NEW EVANGEL

'Let all the house of Israel therefore know assuredly, that God hath made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom ye crucified.'—ACTS ii. 36 (R.V.).

THE situation that day was beset with extraordinary difficulties. Peter himself ran great risk. Hardly ever had a man a more trying task assigned to him, or one more likely to involve him in trouble and danger. He was an impulsive and hot-headed man naturally, and his excitable temperament might very easily, in the critical circumstances in which he was so suddenly and unexpectedly placed, have led him into a fateful indiscretion. For the great mixed multitude was throbbing and palpitating with excitement. A single foolish word or inopportune reference might have acted like a spark among gunpowder, and caused a fearful convulsion. The occasion demanded wonderful calmness and presence of mind. And it affords a singular proof of the reality and extent of the Spiritual Power present on that memorable day, and manifestly influencing and impressing both the speaker and his audience. The supernatural visitation and Divine investment with the tongue of fire and the fulness of the Holy Ghost in the upper room, was the fitting prelude and preparation for the grave

responsibilities it fell to him now to discharge, and the issues of which were to turn out so momentous and so far-reaching in their influence. It is a singular instance of the literal fulfilment of the promise—'I will be with thy mouth.' 'For I will give you a mouth and wisdom which all your adversaries shall not be able to gainsay nor resist.' For the wonderful thing is that it all happened so naturally and as a matter of course. 'The geatest miracle of God's providence,' says Isaac Taylor, 'is that it is carried on without a miracle.' And so too, the miracle here is that this plain unlettered Galilean should face that suspicious and hostile crowd, and speak in their ears unpalatable truths and unwelcome charges that made them criminals and cruel murderers; and yet, instead of turning on the apostolic preacher and stoning him to death—as they did Stephen only a little later on—they quailed and trembled and wept under the consciousness of their awful guilt, and three thousand stricken souls were won for Christ under that one sermon. It will be an instructive and helpful exercise for us to consider some separate elements in this case, all of which contribute in their degree to the magnificent and gracious result.

I. *The Preacher.* Peter was always to the front. Some think this position was due to him as the oldest of the disciples. Or it may have been that he had occupied a somewhat better social position, and had made greater sacrifice for Christ. Most likely these and other explanations of his foremost position have to give place, and make room for his native energy and force of character; as also his Celtic fire and fervour, and his irrepressible natural disposition.

Sometimes we may think it would have been as well for him to court the shade, and be less prominent and outspoken; and yet every one will give him credit for integrity of heart and honesty of purpose. If he spake unadvisedly with his lips at times, it was due rather to want of power to repress and control himself, than any aggressive spirit of self-assertion, that would lead him to lord it over his brethren, and assume a supreme position. He certainly blundered occasionally, and got severe reprimands, and warning words, from the great Master. One wonders if he always felt them as deeply as he ought to have done, or took them sufficiently to heart; but certainly we can say this for him, he cherished no bitterness or feeling of resentment. He was generous-hearted and unselfish to a degree.

The denial of his Lord by Peter was as truly tragic, as it was certainly most lamentable. Strange infatuation which must have made of him for the time Satan's helpless captive and prisoner! Why should he volunteer his own loyalty and devotion, and exalt and magnify it, so needlessly and so confidently, at the expense of everybody else? There is only one possible explanation; and we ought ever to be grateful that it has been placed on record—'And the Lord said, Simon, Simon, behold, Satan asked to have you, that he might sift you as wheat; but I have made supplication for thee, that thy faith fail not: and do thou, when once thou hast turned again, stablish thy brethren. And he said unto Him, Lord, with Thee I am ready to go both to prison and to death. And He said, I tell thee, Peter, the cock shall not crow this day, until thou shalt thrice deny that thou knowest Me.' The simple fact is here made

plain that Satan had a share in this sad business. He wanted to sift the man, in the hope that he might succeed in exposing and ruining him. And Peter himself, because of his self-confidence, became an easy prey to the enemy of his soul. His exuberance of sincere emotion and affection made him unaware of his own weakness. He was wanting in reserve of strength and staying power, when the terrible strain unexpectedly and in a moment swept over him like a fierce tornado. Everything was flung away. The challenge of a servant-maid filled him with terror and dismay. And the continuation and repetition of this torture three times over, made him feel as if a conspiracy had been formed to entrap him, and commit him to the now desperate fortunes of his betrayed Master. Perhaps it occurred to him that the surest way to disprove their allegations was to assume the character of a rough and hard and irreligious man altogether—'But he began to curse and to swear, saying, I know not this Man of whom ye speak.' I have a very strong impression this fisherman-disciple of Jesus must have learned to swear in his earlier days. The old evil habit was repressed and conquered and apparently dead, since his conversion to the religious life and fellowship of Jesus. But in this weak hour of disaffection and denial, the miserable man is made to possess the iniquities of his youth; and, long after the great renunciation, they still claim a provisional lordship and lingering dominion, painfully difficult to obliterate and to eradicate.

But it is just here the Divine mercy intervenes and interferes. Satan has brought Peter into deep and troubled waters. But while the sifting has gone

forward, Christ has been tenderly watching and waiting and interceding—that his faith might not fail. This sore discipline had its mission, and was to fulfil a gracious purpose both for himself and many more coming after him. It is a stern fact that men must 'learn in sorrow what they teach in song'; and Peter's bitter and sorrowful experience was no exception to the Divine rule. Yet the old Psalmist's splendid testimony is true:—

> 'A good man's footsteps by the Lord
> Are orderèd aright;
> And in the way wherein he walks
> He greatly doth delight.
> Although he fall, yet shall he not
> Be cast down utterly:
> Because the Lord with His own hand
> Upholds him mightily.'

And so, when the crisis came—'immediately, while he yet spake'—cursing and swearing—'the cock crew. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter. And Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how that He said unto him, Before the cock crow this day, thou shalt deny Me thrice. And he went out and wept bitterly.'

We do not need to linger over the touching details of his forgiveness, and restoration to the Risen Saviour's friendship, and fresh consecration to the apostolic function. But we are called to pause and wonder over the change effected on this man's whole bearing and attitude towards Christ, and His precarious and dangerous enterprise, in less than two months' time. We have difficulty in believing that the man who trembled and cursed and swore away his religious convictions, for fear of some maid-servants who

happened to be cleaning the court-room on the morning of Good Friday, can be the same who, on the day of Pentecost, confronted the mob, and dared their hostility, and confessed his faith in the crucified Nazarene, and told them to their faces that His blood was on their hands and on their heads. That he should have the courage and boldness to speak as he did is simply marvellous; and that the Jewish multitude should have respectfully listened and relented, is, if possible, more marvellous still. For he was unlettered and ignorant. He had a provincial accent. He could make no pretence to the flights of oratory, or the charm of glowing eloquence. He was a plain working fisherman telling the simple story of the, to us, now familiar gospel, with profound conviction, and under deep emotion. That he was the same man, and the same kind of man he used to be, and never lost or left behind him his old fickle, fitful temperament and peculiar individuality, is to be gathered from the fact that in later days Paul 'withstood him to the face because he was to be blamed,' for weakness and timidity and inconsistency, very much as before. We have here an impressive and inspiring illustration of the truth that, while grace does not change or obliterate the features of individual human character, the fulness of the Holy Ghost will so take a man out of himself, and so lift him above himself, that his very natural weakness shall contribute to his new spiritual strength, and increase his power and usefulness. It is distinctly to the credit of Peter that—with all his faults—he was one of the gifted few—

> 'Who knew the seasons when to take
> Occasion by the hand.'

And so he fearlessly stood in the breach, as a witness unto the Risen Christ; and there was given unto him a tongue as of fire, the influence and effect of which has simply been unparalleled in human history. God the Spirit made use of him that day as 'a new, sharp threshing instrument having teeth'; and the heavenly force and influence, generated through the human agency of a humble Galilean fisherman, continues to benefit and bless the world to this hour.

II. *The Audience.* The bondage of Egypt and the captivities of Babylon had served a gracious purpose for the Jews themselves, as well as the nations with whom they were associated. The promise made to Abraham long before was destined to hold good—'And in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' A gradual process of enlargement was fitted to greatly widen their human sympathies, and rescue them from narrow prejudice and religious exclusiveness. It was a lengthened and painful exercise which prepared the way for the breaking down of the middle wall of partition 'in the fulness of time.' Long before the destruction of Jerusalem and the national dispersion, the policy of Rome was to decentralise, and scatter the Jewish element into the various provinces of the empire. It tended to weaken their national life at the centre, and was a civilising and educating influence in outlying regions where the subject races were difficult of control. We are in great danger of overlooking the wonderful work done by the Pagan Roman Rule, in preparing the way of the Lord, and, quite literally, making in the desert a highway for our God. The Power that ruled the world at the birth of Christ was

stern and severe enough; but the abstract principle of law and justice had an acknowledged place in its statute-book. The enterprises of commerce and civilisation made many a famous Roman road; and improved and far-extended means of communication by land and sea were thus opened up. And then the all but perfect development of their system of both civil and military organisation, enabled the government at the centre to keep in touch with the most distant provinces of the vast empire, and maintain over them unbroken sway and sovereignty. A recent writer[1] has ventured the bold suggestion that some of our own countrymen may have been soldiers in certain Roman legions, and may have been ordered for service in the distant East; and thus may have been links in the chain of influence that emanated from Calvary and Pentecost. And indeed the fond imagination of the poet may not be mere fancy after all, when he sings of an Irish Celt witnessing the crucifixion, while exercising his function as a Roman centurion; and who, returning to his countrymen—

> 'Told that half the world barbarian thrills already with the faith,
> Taught them by the Godlike Syrian, Cæsar lately put to death.'

In any view we take of the situation, it is plain there had been a strange mixing and commingling of Jew and Gentile under Roman rule; and when the scattered Jews returned from the far East and North and South, and from the far West of Spain and Britain—the verge of the empire toward the setting sun—and eagerly listened to Peter's

[1] Professor Stokes on Acts, vol. i. p. 110.

sermon on the streets of Jerusalem, God in His gracious providence was providing them with a gospel message to carry back to 'every nation under heaven,' whence they had come to keep the feast. The case of the Ethiopian chamberlain whom Philip met on his homeward journey is a striking illustration of the wonderful possibilities of fruitful influence within a man's reach, when he comes under religious impressions, and discovers the key by which he can interpret the Scriptures, and find Christ and the gospel in them; and himself becomes the witness among the heathen to the renovating and transforming spiritual power of Christianity. We are tempted to draw upon our imagination, and think of what might have been on the 22nd of June 1897, when the great procession marched through the streets of London to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee of Queen Victoria's illustrious reign; and returned thanks to God for the mercies and blessings of sixty eventful years, in St. Paul's Cathedral! It was the glad and grateful acknowledgment of the whole British Empire to the goodness and mercy of the God of nations. And it resembled Pentecost in this respect at least, that men and women 'out of every nation under heaven' gathered to the great and glad occasion. The whole world was represented there on that never-to-be-forgotten day! All who took any part in the imposing spectacle, and all who were privileged to witness it, must have carried away profound impressions of our national greatness and glory; and all thoughtful men must have been moved to own that the Christian religion, above everything else, had contributed to the nation's prosperity and influence in the face of the whole world. And yet, we cannot help frankly and unreservedly giving

expression to the conviction, that if there had been more room made for homage to the Risen, Reigning Redeemer; and if there had been a more distinct and definite waiting on God for the Pentecostal Power; the strangers in London might have received a spiritual baptism which might have led to a new record of fresh 'Acts of the Apostles' all over the world! We may certainly hope and pray, in any case, that a great national event like this, with a religious element at the very heart of it, may prove a blessing to the whole community, and influence the very ends of the earth.

But after all, the main element in the crowd which Peter had to face, and that which was most critical, and suspicious, and ill to manage, was certainly that representing the dwellers at Jerusalem. Some of the humbler classes were doubtless friendly to the cause of the crucified Jew, and in ordinary circumstances Peter might have counted on their sympathy and support. But then the church people were decidedly and bitterly hostile. To preach a gospel sermon to them might have seemed to most men like casting pearls before swine. And so, with such an excitable man as Peter, face to face with such an excitable and dangerous concourse of people, it is truly wonderful to mark his calm self-possession and presence of mind; as well as his delicate and skilful and powerful presentation of the argument for Christ and Christianity. It profoundly impresses us with an enhanced conception of this rare gift of Spiritual Power, enabling him thus to speak, and compelling them thus to listen.

III. *The Sermon.*

1. Quite naturally Peter begins with an explanation.

The circumstances were being seriously misunderstood, and the Galileans deliberately slandered. There was certainly unusual and unaccountable excitement. But the mockers who said, 'These men are full of new wine,' were not honest. They had a malicious object in view, and wished to discredit the new movement at its outset. Yet they were checkmated at once. No respectable Israelite was wont either to eat or drink before the hour when the morning sacrifice was offered; and to say that one hundred and twenty decent men and women were in a state of intoxication at nine in the morning was a gratuitous insult. But the intended sneer served a good purpose, for it provided a kind of text on which the preacher could found, when he refuted the slander, in order to make room for the true apology. He carried his hearers away back to the prophecy of Joel, and quoted a familiar passage—apparently from memory—about what is to happen 'in the last days,' when God shall pour out 'of His Spirit on all flesh.' As Jews, they were deeply interested in the unfolding of the destiny of their church and nation; and when Peter was able with calmness and composure—an indication that his brain was clear and unclouded, and that he was warranted in repudiating their vile insinuation—to recite and expound the prophetic reference to events happening before their very eyes, he immediately succeeded in disarming their hostility, and in measure gained their confidence and sympathy. The prophecy is wide and general, and some of its details as to awful signs and wonders may still be in reserve 'before the day of the Lord come, that great and notable day.' But it is essentially a message that fits itself into 'the last days.' Peter claimed for

that day's work of wonder the inauguration of the dispensation of the Spirit. 'The last days' stretch themselves out from Christ's Coming in human flesh and form, to His Coming 'the second time without sin unto salvation.' Though this prophecy found its fitting fulfilment on the day of Pentecost, history may be said to have repeated itself ever since; for the progress and power of the church has always been in proportion to the visitation of 'the breath' and 'the fire.' Peter was led to vindicate and justify the excitement and enthusiasm and miraculous tongues at Pentecost, as only the fulfilling of Scripture in the gift of Power for the world's conversion. There have often been accompanying incidental circumstances of a startling and alarming nature; and prophesyings and visions and dreams may have found a place sometimes in the intense and agitated experiences identified with a new and sudden ordeal like this. Men and women, old and young, who have lived through this memorable visitation of God, are likely to manifest their wisdom and good sense in distinguishing between that which is only accidental and that which is really essential and enduring. And the interesting and encouraging thing in both Joel's prophecy and Peter's sermon is this, that the Spirit's working, and gospel preaching, are linked inseparably together, and the success of the one involves that of the other. Peter himself, writing in his later days to the scattered strangers, makes touching reference to this connection, when he speaks of 'things which are now reported unto you, by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven.' And oh, what a consolation is it, in these 'last days,' and perhaps near the end of them—

when gospel times may be approaching their close, and about to give place to the coming of 'that great and notable day of the Lord'—to be able to fall back on an old prophetic word like this, and cling fondly to it, and hold it true for our age and our generation, for the church and the world still—'And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved!'

2. The effusion of the Holy Ghost, as now explained and defended by Peter here, is only the latest development in the great mystery of Godliness he was now concerned to expound. To the Jewish mind and heart Messiah's coming embodied the national hopes and aspirations of well-nigh a thousand waiting years. And indeed Joel's great prophecy of the gift of the Spirit would, very likely, by them be absorbed in their great ideal of the Messianic Kingdom, of which the Hebrews so fondly dreamed. And so, when the preacher came to claim Messiahship for the Nazarene crucified in Jerusalem only a few weeks before, he had on hand a very delicate and difficult task. For, remember, these men were largely responsible for that dark Friday's brutal work. They condemned Him to death as a pretender and impostor and blasphemer. They refused to recognise one single claim He made. And now Peter proposes to reassert every one of them, and to make good the contention that Jesus was right, and they were wrong, all through. 'Who is sufficient for these things?' Will they tear him in pieces, or make him share the fate of his Master? No doubt they were Divinely influenced and restrained; and the Spirit was working in them the grace of contrition and penitence. But all the more, on that account, are we called upon to

admire the rare tact, and holy skill, and masterful gentleness, with which he handled his theme, and managed that excited crowd. While he used great plainness of speech, and shrunk not from the statement of the stern and unwelcome truth, yet it was all done in a spirit that showed no bitterness in his tone, and no malice or revenge in his heart. Nay, he clearly indicated that God Himself was behind them, and they were only giving effect to His purpose and accomplishing His plan.

It is instructive to note the inspired fisherman's skilful way and method in commending Christ Jesus to the men who crucified Him. 'The preacher sought to find out acceptable words.' His first reference is to the *Man*—'Jesus Christ a Man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know.' He was a Man, a Jew, one of their own countrymen, of their own kith and kin. And His wonderful works were the token of the Divine approbation. This was the finger-mark of heaven, and sealed His claim to goodness, and worth of character. By this high testimony the allegation that He was a bad man was completely disproved. God was unmistakably on His side. We have only the merest outline of the sermon, and must read between the lines, if we would trace the point and purpose of his argument, and mark its Spirit-given power to cut them to the heart as with a sword of steel. For that Good Man, whom God had approved of, had been 'despised and rejected' by them. 'Him being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain.' It must have appeared a strange

contradiction to these Jews, that Jesus should have been approved of God, and yet delivered up with His knowledge and consent. It looked like a miscarriage of justice. What shall we say if Peter here found opportunity to preach and commend the doctrine and gospel of a *suffering* Messiah, till these astonished Hebrews began to see, that the Messiah of Isaiah's prophecy was identified in the Christ of history—Jesus of Nazareth? And so, devout Hebrew hearts would find in Christ, and the cruel wrongs that had been so recently inflicted on Him at their hands, the true meaning and interpretation of their innocent Passover Lamb, whose death and blood was understood to redeem their lives from destruction, and send past their door the angel of death. Thus they looked, literally, on Him whom they had pierced; and their consciousness of guilt grew great; and they fell like the ripe corn to the scythe of the reaper.

3. But Peter had the secret in his possession, the announcement of which was to fill them with new amazement and surprise. They had done their worst. The victim of their fatal malignity was laid in the grave, and they imagined the end had come. But it was only the beginning. For He it was 'whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death; because it was not possible that He should be holden of it.' He was speaking to Jews, who knew the Scriptures, and had David in high honour; and he quotes these closing verses of Psalm xvi., and assures them the prophecy there written concerns, not David himself, but his great Son and Lord. 'He, seeing this before, spake of the resurrection of Christ, that His soul was not left in hell, neither His flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof

we all are witnesses.' Here Peter assumes for himself and his comrades in the great commission, the high function with which their Risen Lord had intrusted them. It was a bold and daring and highly dangerous assertion to venture in face of that inflammable mixed multitude. But he had a signal advantage over them. He could speak with supreme confidence and authority. It was no mere rumour, or second-hand report. He was not now retailing hearsay evidence. The foundation of his gospel-structure was laid deep in Christ's empty grave. For they had been there. They saw and knew and were able unquestionably to identify Him. The evidence of His resurrection was unimpeachable. He had showed himself alive to them 'by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God.' And there was a glorious sequel to this. For, one day He held tryst with His disciples in Jerusalem, and led them out as far as to Bethany; and these eleven honest and trustworthy men saw Him ascending heavenward. 'While they beheld He was taken up: and a cloud received Him out of their sight.' God the Father showed His approbation of the character and life-work of His Son while on the earth; and when it was finished, He lifted Him out of the grave, and gave Him honour and glory and power at His own right hand. It was the supreme and crowning credential to the completeness of Christ's great redemption work. Then, in the perfection of His glorified humanity—'The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, until I make thy foes thy footstool.' He is anew consecrated and anointed with the fulness of the Spirit to be 'a Priest upon His

throne.' 'Therefore,' says Peter, 'being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, He hath shed forth this which ye now see and hear.' The holy anointing that very day in the upper room, and the inspired boldness consciously experienced in speaking and witnessing for the Risen Saviour, as well as the awe-stricken and tender impressiveness of these gathered thousands, as they quietly listened to the great impeachment, were sure and certain proofs that God's Son was set upon the throne, and all power in heaven and on earth put into His pierced hands. And so the apostle reaches the climax of his appeal, and clinches and rivets his sublime argument, when he concludes—'Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made this same Jesus whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.'

Such then is the scripture model and example of a true gospel sermon. It was the first. The preacher and the audience and the occasion were all great. The sinner was humbled, and the Saviour was exalted. It has been said that the teaching is defective inasmuch as there is no direct reference to our Lord's Divinity or to His atoning death. To my thinking this is a mistake. These two great doctrines are imbedded in the very heart of the sermon, and give to it its essential character and power. Peter's great words have been echoing down the ages, and they embody the church's message to the world ever since. It may seem strange—and yet it should not—that the first gospel sermon should have been preached on the streets of the city that were red with His blood, and that the first offer of pardon should have been

made to the men that spilt it. But it was His deliberate wish. It was like Him. It was worthy of Him. 'Take in all the world,' He was heard to say, 'but *begin* at Jerusalem.' And what took place there that day was a magnificent warrant for the whole world to believe—'that *whosoever* shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.'

> 'Such was the portrait an apostle drew,
> The bright original was One he knew;
> Heaven held his hand—the likeness must be true.'

XIV

THE FIRST-FRUITS

'Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and the rest of the apostles, Brethren, what shall we do? And Peter said unto them, Repent ye, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of your sins; and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. . . . They then that received his word were baptized: and there were added unto them in that day about three thousand souls.'—ACTS ii. 37, 38, 41 (R.V.).

WHEN our Blessed Lord was preparing His disciples for His going away, He gave them clearly to understand its expediency and necessity. It was good and needful both for Him and them. The coming of the Comforter depended on His departure. And it is a noteworthy fact that on the very day of Pentecost the Holy Ghost faithfully discharged both the functions assigned to Him by the Saviour—the one to the church, and the other to the world. The wonders of that glorious day's work began with about a hundred and twenty men and women—friends and disciples of Jesus—who had been praying and waiting in an upper room for the fulfilment of the promise. His own words were these—'But the Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you.' For years they had been sitting at the

Master's feet, and, though they had been dull and dense and stupid scholars, yet they had accumulated great masses of Christian truth and spiritual teaching. But they continued foolish and slow of heart to believe; and even on the resurrection morning the testimony of the women had no appreciation or welcome—for 'their words seemed to them as idle tales, and they believed them not.' And yet facts, and truths, and experiences were being stored up and appropriated by them in such a way, that when the Spirit came to illuminate and inspire them, everything fell into its place and proportion, and produced the unity and consistency and harmony of the new evangel. Some people in these days would have us believe it is a mistake to teach the Shorter Catechism to the youth of our land, because it is elaborate and abstruse and theological, and in measure beyond their years and their comprehension; but, speaking as well from observation as from experience, I can truly say that this storehouse of religious truth has been of great advantage and signal service, when the Spirit kindled the fires of God and lit the lamp of life in the soul. Thus, with Peter and the rest, the strange and mysterious power of reminiscence—the faculty of reviving old impressions and feelings, and recalling past incidents and events and associations—was fittingly utilised by the Holy Ghost; while at the same time the new spiritual insight that was vouchsafed to them lighted up the darkened windows of their souls, and enabled them to interpret and comprehend what had only been seeming mystery and contradiction heretofore. And so the latent energies of these inspired men began to surge and throb in their being with the life and

power of a new spiritual resurrection. The disciples became apostles in a single day. Ere that day's sun had set, Peter came to the front and proved himself a great teacher and learned theologian. Out of the old disjointed fragments of truth he had come to know, and the shocks and surprises and discoveries of personal religious experience, he was able to frame for himself a Christian creed; and he at once opened his lips and preached a rare gospel sermon, that thrilled the very hearts of astonished thousands.

But behind the work of the apostle that day there was the work of the Comforter. Christ, when He told His disciples of His coming, had said—'And He, when He is come, will convict the world in respect of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment.' In this very character, while Peter was preaching, the Spirit was working and witnessing. It was a strange, heavenly communication—a Divine revelation. It awakened the slumbering energies of the guilty conscience, and cleared away every apology and excuse, and made sin and guilt stand out in their awful proportions, and in their inseparable personal relations to the sinner. But the marvellous thing about it all was, that a lifetime's load of guilty conduct culminated and concentrated itself in the one black deed of unbelief—the rejection and crucifixion of the Son of God. And in the wake of this awful conviction, came the revelation of Righteousness crowned and glorified in the Risen Christ of God. And so the crown is taken from the usurper's brow. The prince of this world hath been judged and condemned, and utterly discredited and disgraced for evermore. This is Christ Himself 'with the finger of God' casting devils out of men, by the might of

the Holy Ghost; and no doubt the Kingdom of God is come nigh unto them.

I. Note some striking peculiarities about Peter's sermon. The youthful artist will linger, lovingly and reverentially, over the work of some great old master, that he may reach his secret, and catch his inspiration, and drink in the genius of his art-power into his inmost soul, in the fond dream of hope that some day he may be able, in his own manner and measure, to reassert and reproduce it for himself. And so, too, there are some great lessons for the preacher here. It is a high privilege to sit at the apostle's feet—to listen, and learn, and acquire skill in this heavenly, holy art.

1. Like Apollos, Peter shows Himself '*mighty in the Scriptures.*' He was certainly familiar with his Old Testament. It had a prominent and important function assigned to it, as the very groundwork of his discourse. He was only an expositor and an interpreter. He made old Hebrew psalms and prophecies stand out in living power and authority. They fitted in with perfect exactness to the needs of the new time. He showed his masterful spirit in that he could lay the truth of God alongside sinful men's lives, and give it an application which, he took for granted, would be convincing and conclusive. And what absolute confidence he had in his Bible! The Scriptures could not be broken. And this new theological position he was called to occupy, and this new testimony to the Messiahship of Jesus of Nazareth, and this new outpouring of the Spirit, are all vindicated and verified by an appeal to the Word of God.

The man who would preach must be sure of his ground as to this old book. It must be for himself, and for the purposes for which he makes use of it, trustworthy and true. He must be able to depend on it, and claim for its awful testimony, full support and consideration. For it is the church's charter and statute-book. It should be in the preacher's hand, and in his memory, and in his heart. When John Bunyan came out into the light of God, he got a new book in the Word of Truth, and he says—'I began to look into the Bible with new eyes, and read as I never did before; and, indeed, then I was never out of the Bible.' And this might well and almost literally be true, for the Bible is a world to live in; and the man who is to preach the word must have his home in it. And so, when he comes forth to fulfil his mission, he will be able to wield to good purpose 'the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.' Some good men have held to the opinion that the Spirit is wont to employ, in cases of awakening and conversion, the quotations from the Scriptures, rather than any poor words that are the preacher's own. 'Is not My word as a fire, saith the LORD, and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?' 'For the word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and quick to discern the thoughts and intents of the heart.' 'Thou hast magnified Thy word above all Thy name.'

2. Peter enunciated clear and definite teaching concerning *the Person of Christ.* No doubt this great doctrine had just shaped and claimed for itself a large place in his own spiritual consciousness. He had

made a great discovery. Jesus of Nazareth dovetailed into the ideal Messiah. And so the preacher had a great word to utter about this crucified Jew, made by God 'both Lord and Christ.' For water cannot rise higher than its own level; and any man can appreciate the messenger by his message. He can only represent and commend Him to others in the measure of what He has become to himself. And no doubt this explains how completely and beautifully this gospel of Peter presents to us a Person—the glorious Person of Christ. Some have desiderated clearer doctrinal detail, and more direct reference to His finished work as Sin-bearer and Redeemer of guilty men; but the attitude of the apostle is vindicated and justified to the full, inasmuch as he points these trembling Jews, not so much to the cross, as to the Man that hangs on it. All through it is *Ecce Homo!* And as they gaze on that pale, suffering, human face, with the thorns they plaited for His crown still piercing His holy brow, He slowly grows great and good and glorious and Divine before their very eyes—God's Prophet and Priest and King, for a sinful and rebellious world. Perhaps the old word, so memorable and so gracious, came back to him across the years, and was uttered as the crowning sentence in his great appeal, with a strangely enhanced meaning, and added pathos and tenderness—'Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!' He preached that day—'Christ, and Him crucified.' For them it meant not only, and not so much, the gift of salvation, as the gift of the Saviour Himself![1]

[1] I have long been familiar with a precious little book by the late revered Dr. A. A. Bonar, *The Gospel Pointing to the Person of Christ.* It has been a great help to me. It will repay careful study.

3. The *law* had its place in this sermon. There was some very plain speaking. He reminds them that their wicked hands are stained and red with innocent blood. The crucifixion of Jesus was murder. The charge was pressed home with relentless persistence. Peter might have been, and in reality was, counsel for the prosecution. He seems to us to have spoken like some Covenanter or Puritan preacher; or rather, we might say, they learned to speak like him, and followed in his footsteps. In the best days of gospel preaching, and in times of manifest Spiritual Power, law and sin have been put in their rightful prominent, and indeed, foremost place. You must learn to wound before you attempt to heal. You must tear up, and tear to pieces a man's natural character, and reveal to him 'the plague of his own heart,' before he will understand the stern landmarks of the Divine law, or appreciate in any proper measure the imputed righteousness of Christ. It is in any case hard and severe and unwelcome work. We need it sadly in our time. We want an old Hebrew seer to come among us, in the spirit and power of Elijah, or of his New Testament representation, John the Baptist, who shall have the courage to preach a new crusade against the sins and vices and crimes of modern civilisation, and inaugurate a new Puritan protest against the shams and concessions and indulgences of so-called modern Christianity. We want a new return to the law of Sinai and the cross of Calvary; and as we come by the law to the knowledge of sin, and by the cross to the knowledge of sin forgiven, surely our penitential tears will evince the depth of our conviction and the reality of our evangelical repentance. For we too, as well as these

old Jews, killed the Prince of Life and crucified the Lord of Glory. All of us had our share in that world's tragedy. And it may be that we are doubly guilty, in that we have 'trodden under foot the Son of God, and counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith we were sanctified, a common thing, and have done despite unto the Spirit of Grace.' Would that modern preaching were more outspoken about human guilt, and that the Spirit might come anew to work conviction in the world, and restore among us this lost sense of sin.

4. But there was also at the heart of this famous address the offer of a full, free, present *salvation*. It was thoroughly, emphatically evangelical. It is great in its hopefulness and confidence. There is no grudge, or grumble, or limitation in its tone. It does not give the least impression that there is anything exceptional, or in the nature of special concession to these Jerusalem sinners. They get a glad and glorious new chance. And they are as welcome to it as any other can possibly be. Nay, they have the priority and the preference. It does not mean that there is a premium on villainy and wickedness—as if the very greatness of sin and guilt were meritorious. But it does mean that great guilt is no real barrier in the way of forgiveness. Grace is beautiful when seen triumphing over sin ; and the greater the sinner, the more wonderful and magnificent the grace that can forgive, and change him into a child of God and an heir of glory. We have great lessons yet to learn, so as to be able to preach and hear this grand old gospel worthily, and adequately and well. It has a great sweep, and can reach afar. To tell men to believe in Him whom they had crucified, as the

Jewish Messiah, and as exalted by God to be the mighty Saviour of sinners both of the Jews and of the Gentiles, seemed as if straining their faith to the very uttermost. And yet it has stood the strain. Perhaps the strange experience through which Peter himself had come, gave him increasing confidence and freedom in proclaiming these glad tidings to the chief of sinners, since it was the fact that he had been as great a sinner as any one of them, and had less excuse than they. He had been forgiven much, and he loved much. And so, the gospel he was encouraged from his own experience, and inspired by the Spirit of Pentecost, to preach with overpowering unction and tenderness, made room in the heart of Christ for the biggest, blackest, vilest sinner in all Jerusalem.

II. It might be useful to endeavour to trace some features of the Spirit's power and working in connection with the preaching of the gospel by Peter. This is certainly a most mysterious process. It is sure to baffle all attempts at analysis or explanation. 'The Spirit bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh and whither it goeth, so is every one that is born of the Spirit.' We can only look on in reverence and wonder and adoration.

1. There is true scope and function for the Holy Spirit's interference just here. Peter was himself under strong spiritual influence while preaching. But he was fully aware of his own limitations. He had to stand aside and make room for this Divine Workman. There is manifestly a measure of reserve and awe over his soul, while he explains the strange

Spiritual Presence and Power there is among them. He expressly accounts for the situation in this way, and leaves room and opportunity for the Spirit to work. Up to a certain point human agency is paramount, and it looks as if the impression were exclusively due to human effort and influence. But a stage is reached when this work becomes truly supernatural, and man can only watch and wait and pray. It was so in a very remarkable way in the conversion of Lydia at a later date. Providence made preparation for it by bringing her over the sea to Philippi. Then Paul was sent for to meet her; and he had also to come to Europe for the purpose. And prayer had much to do with it; for she was converted at the place by the river-side, where prayer was wont to be made. And preaching had its place and influence as well, and the preacher was an apostle. But in the record, which accounts for all that had gone before, this significant statement concerning the woman finds a place—'whose heart the Lord opened, to give heed unto the things which were spoken by Paul.' It seems plain from a simple narrative like this, that while we are fellow-workers with God in this great evangelical enterprise, there is at a certain point a limit to human endeavour; and when the great crisis emerges, the work is taken up into the Divine hands exclusively. And no wonder! For if the Father sustained the claims of His Divine Son, and shewed His approval of Him and His mission, by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by Him; He has done the very same in an even more notable and impressive sphere, by the quickening of dead souls together with Christ, and making them partakers of His resurrection-life and power. A

miracle in the sphere of the physical is a great and awful display of Divine power; but a miracle in the region of the moral and spiritual is a still more signal Divine intervention, and is more likely to make profound impression, and produce enduring results. Godet makes a very remarkable and startling statement, and one that at first sight is fitted to awaken surprise and misgiving, when he says—'The Supernatural in its highest form is not the miraculous—it is *holiness*!' All will be ready to concede this claim of one of our very greatest modern theologians; only we would like it to be understood that the situation becomes, if possible, not less miraculous, but more so, when we are in a position to dispense with miracle altogether, and the Supernatural simply becomes the natural. Deep down at the very roots of fallen human nature, the Supernatural and the Spiritual work so effectively as to produce a renewing and regenerating influence, that transforms and glorifies the whole life, and makes goodness and holiness natural and beautiful. Holiness, as the assertion of mere human will and effort and character, is a vain and impossible dream. It has often been attempted, but has always ended in failure. But the Spirit's work at Pentecost in the hearts of unregenerate men, was a Divine interference so powerful and radical and far-reaching, that it crushed and conquered the native tendencies of human nature, and superseded and eradicated the dominion of sin in the heart and in the life. Faith in the crucified Son of God on the human side of this mystery, led to the communication of Spiritual Power on the Divine side; and men's lives in thousands were redeemed from destruction. And, in a natural and beautiful order, the tree that had been

made good at the root began immediately and naturally to bring forth good fruit—'fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.' Let us ever carry with us, in the great struggle with evil within us, and around us, this assuring and inspiring conviction, that God is on our side, and that we are in holy and blessed league with the Supernatural and the Divine!

2. This work of the Spirit was short and sharp. The whole case presents to us an instructive practical illustration, on a large scale, of what is called sudden conversion. True, there may be a lengthened process preparatory to the great crisis; and there may be a still more protracted discipline and development of the spiritual life, after it is over. But certainly there is a distinct and definite point of time—a moment in which the soul passes from death unto life. Before our Lord raised Lazarus from the dead He said, 'Take ye away the stone'; and after it was over he ordered them to 'loose him and let him go.' But in between these two events the mighty miracle was enacted, when in a moment of supreme power and authority, Jesus 'cried with a loud voice, *Lazarus, come forth.* And he that was dead came forth.' True, he was bound hand and foot, and was bandaged and blind. But he was a living man. He had, literally, passed over from death unto life at the Divine summons, and the miracle was over. And it is ever the same in the mysterious, but blessed transition between spiritual death and spiritual life. In a supreme moment of mercy men pass across the boundary line that separates the living from the dead, and begin to live anew. The Scriptures lay stress on the depth of

this great religious experience; and you might reasonably conclude that in order to be genuine it must be sudden. For it is the kindling of the great altar-fire in a spiritually dead heart; it is the communication of the vital spark of Divine life to a human soul. It comes with the speed of the lightning's flash, and its work is done. If you want confirmation of this fact you need only to turn to Scripture history. Peter himself, and James and John, and Matthew the publican, the woman of Samaria and the penitent thief, Zaccheus and Bartimæus, Lydia and the jailor at Philippi, and, perhaps the most wonderful among them all, Saul of Tarsus, and many more, were all suddenly converted. There are diversities and peculiarities in the operations of the one Spirit, and no man has right or warrant to constitute himself, or his experience, a necessary rule or law for his brother. Every man must bear his own burden here. Nor need men perplex themselves, if they find it impossible to give day and date in proof of their conversion. The thing may happen, and yet it may not be till long after that you come to be quite sure of yourself and it. It is quite possible to dogmatise, and be a little too sure about yourself. And indeed it is just weakness like this that has created an unhappy prejudice in the minds of many good men against sudden conversion, lest it should turn out sadly wanting in the elements of stability, and endurance, and genuine change of heart and life. Bible conversion, whether apparently sudden or slow—the work of an hour, or of a year—is definitely described as 'turning to the Lord.' And it confirms the genuineness and reality of the change, when professedly converted men 'cleave' to Him,

and follow on to know Him. The miracle had done its work, and its success was complete, when the man was able from new experience to give his splendid testimony: 'One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see.' And, after all, this is the ultimate test, and the true certificate of genuine conversion. But, at the same time, the outstanding and memorable fact remains, that one afternoon, and under one sermon, about three thousand souls were suddenly and savingly converted to God.

3. There was, moreover, great and intense excitement. The hundred and twenty in the upper room first betrayed the pressure of excited feeling to such an extent, that they attracted public attention, and were painfully misunderstood and misrepresented by many in the crowd. The people 'were all amazed.' They were living through that day's unexampled experience at tremendously high pressure. And the excitement spread like an infectious disease. What stir and commotion in that subdued and solemnised throng when the Spirit gave effect to Peter's awful challenge, and wrought within them deep conviction and contrition, in view of their terrible sin and crime! Thousands began to cry out in soul-agony—'Men and brethren, what shall we do?' The arrows of God were made sharp in the hearts of the King's enemies, then and there. The people fell under them wounded and sore stricken, 'and pricked in their hearts.' But this was only the beginning. These weeping penitents were pointed to the suffering Messiah—the Lamb of God themselves had slain! He is held up to view as the Substitute: and as they look in simple faith and true repentance, Christ draws these men—all kinds of them, and all that is in them

—unto Himself; and there settles down over their excited spirits, like heaven's own holy calm after storm, and clear shining after rain—'joy and peace in believing.'

Some men are desperately afraid of anything like excitement in connection with religion. They frown on it, and denounce it, and flee from it as if it were the plague. Have we not sometimes seen these same men of the world mad with excitement over a general election, or a horse-race, or a football-match, or a gold fever, or a bank failure? And if there sometimes are intense and extravagant associations connected with spiritual awakening and times of refreshing, why should any criticise or complain? Some people who seem to have a ready apology for the glare of the theatre, and the glitter of the ball-room and the dance, have nothing but harsh words and carping criticism over excited and protracted meetings, where the Holy Ghost is present, to renew the work of Pentecost, and build up the Church of Christ, and gather lost souls into the kingdom of God. What we want—in these last days, when the woe of them that are at ease in Zion, is hanging over us dark and threatening—is not less excitement over spiritual things, but a great deal more. Anything to disturb this dead calm of spiritual death! 'Come from the four winds, O Breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live!'

III. Only a few more words are needed to make account of the results of Peter's preaching and the Spirit's quickening, as seen in the new influence that shaped, for permanent good, the lives of multitudes, who then listened to and obeyed the gospel.

1. Foremost among the evangelical issues of that wonder-working day was the *saving faith* of believing thousands. Reference has already been made to it as a spiritual gift. Here we are to regard it as an inwrought human and Christian experience. It was supernatural in its origin, and spiritual in its exercise, but it moved along the line of the human conscience and understanding and heart and will. The mass of cold, hard unbelief began to thaw and melt. The severe and stern and self-satisfied spirit began to yield. The sinner's repentings were being kindled together. The relenting and rueing began. 'He was my Friend all the time I was maltreating Him as my very worst of enemies! He was dying for me—instead of me—at the very time I shed His blood!' And so the enmity is slain. Love takes the place of hate. Faith begins its great assertion and high ambition. It is not merely the intellectual exercise that believes a doctrine; it is the high moral and spiritual passion, that arouses confidence and affection and enthusiasm and devotion towards a Person, and ties and twines itself round His very heart. This is the victory that overcometh the world—and everything else as well—even our faith.

2. They were immediately *baptized* into the name of Jesus. This was an article in the great apostolic commission. Their baptism did not precede their conversion; nor did it communicate to them mystic, sacramental, regenerating grace. It only followed, and signified, and sealed, the Spirit's renewing and converting efficacy on their new-born souls. It was the confession of their faith in the crucified and glorified Christ, in face of the church and the world. It must have been a splendid spectacle to

witness about three thousand Christian men and women, publicly renouncing and repudiating their act and part and share in Christ's crucifixion, only seven weeks before, and now deliberately enlisting and enrolling themselves in His great sacramental army. It made good the impotent and cowardly admission of the high priest not long after, when he said—'Behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.' As the result of one single day's evangelism among Jerusalem sinners, about three thousand converted and baptized witnesses for the crucified Nazarene, were added to the church. It was the doing of the Lord, and wonderful in men's eyes.

3. The movement *lasted and extended.* It might have been far otherwise. It was sudden and spasmodic. It took shape in circumstances of great excitement. Had it been a mere human impulse, it should have very soon exhausted itself. But it was of God, and therefore it had in it the elements of endurance and permanence and progress. It was the beginning of the exercise of the great Divine Power, that is to regenerate the world, and emancipate it from the bondage of corruption—the tyranny of evil. The new converts held by the apostles, and by one another. They heaped the coals together, so as to keep the fire burning, and not quench the Spirit. 'They continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and the prayers.' And thus they had a salutary influence. They told on the community. 'Fear came upon every soul.' And they cherished a glad, generous, sympathetic, Christian life among themselves. They had all things common. And such

was their inherent spiritual vitality and power of consolidation, that they not only stood firm in the faith and held their own, but became distinctly active, and powerfully aggressive. 'And the Lord added to them day by day those that were being saved.'

Blessed beginnings of the Church of Christ were these! The first works were faithfully and well done. Had things only continued, as they so auspiciously began, the world had long since been Christian! Sin lieth at the church's door. We still need to wait and pray more than ever for the breath, and the Power, and the tongues as of fire. O for the return of Pentecostal days, to bless the church, and convert the world!

XV

CHRIST COMING INTO THE WORLD, THE CHURCH, AND THE HEART

'There was the true light, which lighteth every man, coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. But as many as received Him, to them gave He the right to become children of God, even to them that believe on His name; which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.'—JOHN i. 9-13 (R.V.).

BOTH with Matthew and Luke the Evangel dates from Bethlehem. The story, as told by them, has in it elements of singular romance and pathos. It appeals powerfully to the imagination and the heart. In response to the decree of the Roman Emperor, great crowds had gathered to their native town, to be enumerated in the roll of citizenship. The inn was crowded with strangers. One lowly couple had come all the way from Nazareth in Galilee. They were compelled to put up in a stable or outhouse, either because they arrived late, or because they were poor. 'There was no room for them in the inn.' Thus Mary's hour of trouble overtook her; and there, in such a lowly case, was JESUS born into the world He had made, and had come to save!

The Evangelist John, writing long after, gives wonderful meaning and importance to what befel

on that eventful night. With him it is nothing less than the Incarnation of the Eternal Word—'And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us—and we beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten from the Father—full of grace and truth.' He gets away behind and beyond the time-limitations of Christ's humanity, and dates his Evangel from the timeless 'beginning.' By a sublime and awful assertion, he claims for the Babe of Bethlehem true Divinity and Eternal Sonship. Doubtless he was familiar with Isaiah's Gospel—'For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given, and the government shall be upon His shoulder; and His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace.' This 'holy thing' was an enigma. To understand and vindicate the suffering and dying of a pure and perfect human character is very hard work indeed. It looks like a contradiction. But John clears up the mystery. Behind Christ's true Manhood was His true Godhead. He was the God-man.

But if He was 'in the beginning,' and 'was with God, and was God,' it was as 'THE WORD.' As spoken word to silent thought, such is the eternal relation of the Son to the Father. He is 'the Image of the invisible God.' He is the great Revealer. He has unfolded and interpreted what must otherwise have been for ever hidden and unknown. This Divine manifestation in Christ covers the entire ground—creation, man's nature, sin, incarnation, redemption, regeneration, and the moral government of the world. Many men have dared to challenge the idea of suffering as associated with God; but some great and devout minds have ventured to make the sugges-

tion that in all Divine self-manifestation there must be effort, and struggle, and limitation, and sacrifice. It is a profound mystery that meets us here, yet may there not be something in the function of the Eternal Logos approaching to this, when He is described as 'the Lamb slain from before the foundation of the world!'

I. CHRIST'S COMING INTO THE WORLD. 'There was the true light, even the light which lighteth every man, coming into the world.' Christ is here regarded as the coming One. It had many and varied aspects and adaptations, but it culminated in the Incarnation. He came as the life and light of the world. At the creation He said—'Let there be light, and there was light.' In His character as the Revealer, He is a light shining in the darkness.

1. He tries to grapple with the *darkness*. The light of reason is from the Divine 'Word.' Every man has in his very being the stamp of heaven. Created in the Divine image and likeness, he still retains distinct lineaments and features, that claim kindred and relationship with God. The light of nature has bestowed on man mind, and conscience, and will. True, the understanding is darkened, the conscience is blunted, and the will is warped. A moral deterioration has settled down on the soul. It is enveloped in darkness. Still, there is in fallen human nature a yearning and groping after better things. Like the sprouts in a dark cellar, turning and growing and stretching long, white, crooked fingers out towards the dim chink of light in the doorway, the shattered, enfeebled elements of a degraded and benighted manhood will assert a deep, Divine

instinct, turning towards light, and truth, and God. Some years ago a party of miners were suddenly entombed in the dark depths of the earth. The rescue-party tried hard to reach the imprisoned men, and at length came so near as to be able to hold communication with them. 'What do you want most?' 'We want everything—but first and most of all we want *light*.' The dim taper of nature's light is, after all, light from heaven. Every man has a faculty for seeing the light, and opening his dark soul to its reception. This terrible struggle between light and darkness has been the tragedy of the ages. Looking back on the history of the world before the Incarnation—or it may have been even after it—John is constrained to admit that the darkness did not comprehend the light. It did not lay hold of, or appropriate it, or give place to it. 'If, therefore,' he mournfully asserts, 'the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!'

2. He tries to grapple with the *ignorance*. 'He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not.' The darkness led to ignorance. Strange infatuation this! From before creation down to His manifestation of God in the flesh, the Eternal Word was ever present in His own world, and busy in the manifestation of Divine wisdom and power. Yet 'the world by wisdom knew not God.' 'Their eyes were holden that they did not know Him.' Christ comes as the Light of the world, and the darkness seems to conquer and extinguish it. He comes as the Creator of the world, and the ignorance refuses to recognise, or do Him homage. And truly says Paul in his Epistle to the Romans—'They are without excuse,' for in the world He has

made we have the credentials of 'His Eternal Power and Godhead.' They tell us of a skilled and sagacious man of science who found in a cave a single bone of an animal long since extinct, and who was able, from that fragment, to construct the entire skeleton of the creature; and even so, there are to be found, rife and plentiful enough—had we the holy skill to look for them and to know them when we find them—traces and tokens and fragments that speak eloquently for Divinity, and bring God very near. Science, falsely so called, may banish Him from His own world, but true science shall ever find Him, and give Him welcome. Goethe has said somewhere—that there is nothing so small as not to be a thought of God. How many such are all around us on every hand—in man, in nature, and the world—could we only seize, and translate, and interpret them!

'Earth's cramm'd with heaven,
And every common bush afire with God,
But only he who knows takes off his shoes.'

There is not, to my mind, a more humiliating scene in all Bible story, than that Athenian altar erected and inscribed '*To an unknown God.*' Greek culture had reached its climax, and was now on the wane. Rome ruled the world, when Christ was born in Bethlehem. Yet neither of them had the sense or wisdom or sagacity, to identify and recognise and acknowledge the heavenly Stranger, who had been so long and so unmistakably among them. It almost seems as if King Nebuchadnezzar were a typical illustration of the blindness and ignorance and insane un-reason of men, in all the ages, who have refused to credit Christ with creation and redemp-

tion work, and do homage to His grace and glory. 'O King Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken: The kingdom is departed from thee. And they shall drive thee from men, and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field; and they shall make thee to eat grass as oxen, and seven times shall pass over thee, until thou know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will.'

'O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee!'

II. Christ Coming into the Church. 'He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.' Christ received no kind welcome from the cold, hard, dark, blind world—'which lieth in the wicked one.' John speaks of the world's treatment of the Creator and Revealer and Saviour, as impious ingratitude and daring crime. And it recoiled upon itself. If the men were bad before, this attitude toward the Christ made them a great deal worse. If they turned their backs to the great white light of heaven, and refused to see by it, then they sealed their own doom. If they refused to know, and to own, Him who made the world, and lived in it—'who was the Brightness of the Father's glory, and the express Image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power'—then must their unbelief, and rebellion, and rejection, darken into moral and spiritual death. Like the fishes of the caves of Kentucky, which, living in the dark, not only lose their sight, but also the eyes wherewith they might have seen—nature thus taking its terrible revenge. Awful beyond words is the retribution, that overtakes a man who will not come to

the light, when the light comes to him—'who loves the darkness rather than the light, because his deeds are evil.'

This rejection of Christ by the world makes a very painful impression. We are inclined to think it must be an exaggeration. It reads like a very gospel of despair, and is fitted to make men shudder. Can it be that John is making the world a foil, as against the church? Is he painting the background in darkest colours, the better to bring out, and make beautiful, the picture itself? At first we may be misled by this fancy. But it is not true. Indeed, bad as the world may be, the church is unspeakably worse. John is not here making a contrast. It is rather a climax. One can bear a good deal of harsh and unkind treatment with equanimity, if it come from those with whom you have little, or nothing in common. You can bear up against misconception and ill-treatment from strangers and aliens. You can endure discomfort and hardship while a sojourner and a traveller by land or sea. And you can flatter and comfort yourself, that when you reach your own fireside, and are again among your own, you will find abundant compensation for all you have, in less happy circumstances, endured. But what a bitter disappointment to find, that, coming to your home and friends, you are subjected to worse treatment than while you were away! This is precisely what Christ endured. 'He came unto His own, and His own received Him not.'

The expression—'His own'—which occurs twice in this same clause, is, in the first instance, neuter, and in the second, masculine. It may be understood to mean generally—His own things and His own friends.

John uses the same word in chap. xix. 27, where, taking in charge the mother of Jesus, at the foot of the cross—'he took her to *his own home*.' We may well ask what this 'home' was to Jesus? It was distinct and different from 'the world.' The home that lived and reigned in His great heart, unquestionably must have been the heritage and possession of a land and city and temple, so dear to the heart of every Jew, and so intimately associated with all the Messianic hopes and expectations. His own people were the dwellers in his own home—his own kith and kin—Israel according to the flesh. They were the objects of His tenderest affection and loving care. They were His peculiar people, and He and they had nearly everything in common. I quote some striking words from Professor Marcus Dods—'The Jews were familiar with the idea of God "dwelling" with His people. At the birth of their nation, while they were still dwelling in tents outside the land of promise, God had His tent among the shifting tents of His people, sharing all the vicissitudes of their wandering life, abiding with them even in their thirty-eight years' exclusion from their land, and thus sharing even their punishment. By the word John here uses, he links the body of Christ to the ancient dwelling of God, round which the tents of Israel had clustered. God now dwelt among men in the humanity of Jesus Christ. The tabernacle was human, the indwelling Person was Divine. In Christ is realised the actual presence of God among His people, the actual entrance into, and participation in human history, which was hinted at in the tabernacle and the temple.'

But all this only makes it the more unaccountable,

that He should have been neglected and refused by 'His own.' He was concealed from the world. The darkness of their nature prevented them from appreciating His presence. But Israel looked down upon other races and nations. They stood very high in their own estimation. They were a people near to God. And observe, He gets nearer. He *was* in the world; but he *came* to the church. It must refer to the outward manifestation—the Incarnation. In the one case it was a visible revelation, in the other only an unseen presence. And indeed they were led to expect His coming, and warned to prepare for it. For Malachi had said—'The Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly come *to His temple*: behold He shall come.' One wonders they were not all looking eagerly, and waiting impatiently for His appearing. Instead of that, the priestly men who should have kept the door open night and day for Him, had it closed and bolted against Him. 'They received Him not.'

It is tempting to try to imagine what might have been if 'His own' had received and welcomed Him when He came in the fulness of time. The nation and the church were one. A great gulf separated them from the heathen world. They represented the great Divine Theocracy. All they needed to fulfil the glorious ideal was the Messianic Presence. 'It should have been a national, solemn, and official acknowledgment,' says Godet, 'on the part of the entire nation, hailing its Messiah, and rendering homage to its God. If the abode prepared had opened in this way, it would immediately have become the starting-point for the conquest of the world. Instead, an unheard-of event took place. In

Agamemnon returning to his palace, after ten years' absence, and falling by the hand of his unfaithful spouse, we have the event which is tragical *par excellence* in Pagan history. But what is that outrage when compared with the Theocratic tragedy? The God invoked by the nation appears in His temple, and is crucified by His own worshippers!'

And has not Israel paid a terrible penalty for not receiving Him? They did it ignorantly, in unbelief. But they did it; and their city and temple and nation have been destroyed. They are distrusted and persecuted, 'scattered and peeled,' in almost every country in the world except our own. They form a startling and striking evidence for the truth of Christianity. A great writer has said that Jewish history, as fulfilling Old Testament prophecy, cannot possibly be set aside, and presents an irresistible testimony to the truth of the Christian religion. They brought it on themselves. Because of unbelief they were broken off. But the end is not yet. A blessing, as well as a curse, pursues them. And 'if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?'

It might be regarded as a bold thing to say that nineteen Christian centuries have not done a great deal to alter the situation. There is a wonderful change for the better, certainly. But the growing light only reveals the deep and dense darkness that still lingers. 'He is in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world does not know Him'—is true—terribly true—of the world to-day. Who—where—are they that do homage to the great Invisible Presence, that made the world, and is in it still? The great Powers of Europe, in their miserable concert,

do not know Him. He is not taken into their confidence. They either ignore Him, or they deliberately defy Him. Forty years ago, Buckle wrote that he fondly hoped the sun of militarism was about to set for ever. The Crimean war rudely upset his peaceful theory. It looks as if it were as far off as ever. What a woful spectacle is before us now—Armenia bleeding slowly to death, the struggle for liberty crushed and overborne—the tottering throne of the Turkish tyrant, bloodstained and odious, propped and bolstered up, by the kings of the earth—whose only motive is mutual jealousy and suspicion, lest others get a richer and better share of the spoil than they! How much longer will this fraud and sham of modern diplomacy be tolerated, or permitted to rule the councils of Europe? Can it be that, in these last days, the world's Creator has gone away and left it to its fate, because it did not know and refused to own Him? 'Be wise now, therefore, O ye kings, be instructed, ye judges of the earth. Kiss the Son, lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way, when His anger is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him.'

Nor can we honestly say that the church is blameless here. Christianity of to-day is overloaded with a huge, unwieldy system. The churches, like Lazarus, are bound, hand and foot, with grave-clothes. Greek and Roman, Lutheran and Anglican—they are all overlaid and paralysed with the wretched rubbish of form, and symbol, and ritual, and sacramentarian superstition. An earthly priesthood, asserting worldly power and prerogative—with gaudy glare and glitter—has superseded 'the great High Priest of our profession.' 'Back to Christ' is the urgent, earnest cry

of our time. And no wonder. Only it is a far cry—and a long way. In all the churches, it is to be feared, Christ is grudged His place and welcome. He comes to His own, and His own receive Him not. A well-authenticated incident in the life of Carlyle has a suggestive bearing on this. One evening, at a small literary gathering where he was present, a lady, famous for her shallow theology, was bewailing the wickedness of the Jews in not receiving our Saviour, and ended by expressing regret that He had not appeared in our own time. 'How delighted,' said she, 'would we all be to throw our doors open to Him, and listen to His Divine precepts! Don't you think so, Mr. Carlyle?' The sturdy sage thus appealed to, in his inimitable, blunt irony, replied—'No, madam, I don't. I think that had He come very fashionably dressed, with plenty of money, and preached doctrines palatable to the higher orders, I might have had the honour of receiving from you a card of invitation, on the back of which would be written—"TO MEET OUR SAVIOUR;" but if He had come uttering His precepts, and denouncing the Pharisees, and associating with publicans and the lower orders, as He did, you would have treated Him much as the Jews did, and have cried out—"*Take Him to Newgate, and hang Him!*"'

III. CHRIST COMING INTO THE HUMAN HEART.

Not known in His world, and not welcomed by His church, whither shall this great Outcast now go? Turning away from the mass and multitude in both, He condescends to make His tender appeal to individual human hearts. He submits to them His heavenly credentials, and Divine mission, as 'the Word made flesh.' The written Word reveals His

great name, and commends His Person, and character, and work, as the God-man. His name is that by which He is recognised and identified and known.

1. We are concerned to grasp the real connection between believing on Christ's name, and receiving Him. The name is the warrant for the belief, and the believing involves the reception. The name here referred to, may naturally be taken as that attested by John himself in his Gospel, as the revelation of the character and will and heart of God, in the Person and work of Christ. To 'believe on—' is one of John's great words. To 'believe—' is simply to take and accept as true. 'The devils believe and tremble.' To 'believe in—' brings you into contact with a person, in whom you are led to trust and confide. To 'believe on—' seems to have fuller and larger reach of meaning. Through His name, you get at the Person, of Christ. You find solid rock, and true rest for your sinking feet. It is the revelation of the Blessed Spirit, glorifying Christ in the sinner's estimation; while his confidence is gently drawn forth, so as to give Him credit for His Incarnation, and cross, and resurrection. The true testimony concerning God's Son is accepted; and the seeking Saviour and the seeking sinner come together; and there is transacted that mystic reception and appropriation, which awakens joy in the presence of the angels of God.

Consider well, sinner, the only question at issue—are you receiving Christ? God in His gospel of grace strongly and earnestly recommends Him—'This is My beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.' Does He please you? Will He suit you as your Saviour? Trouble not yourself needlessly by questioning—will He receive me? He is waiting for

you—not you for Him. And be encouraged with the assurance, that if you do your one and only part in this gracious mystery, Christ will come into your heart—Prophet, Priest, and King—to dwell there and reign supreme for evermore.

2. To every one thus receiving Christ, is promised and bestowed a marvellous reward of grace—'the right to become children of God.' 'The word can neither denote simple *possibility*,' says Godet, 'which is too little, nor *power*, which would be too much; for the believer cannot make himself a child of God. What is meant is *a new standing* granted to the believer, that of a reconciled or justified one, in virtue of which he can receive the Spirit of God, which is in him the principle of a Divine life. By the possession of this life he becomes *a child of God*.' This is very much the teaching of the Shorter Catechism—'Adoption is an act of God's free grace, whereby we are received into the number, and have *a right* to all the privileges of the sons of God.' There was in Roman law a formal, civil transaction, whereby a stranger was introduced into the home, and invested with legal rights and privileges, which were his ever after. This idea was largely in Paul's mind, and may have helped to shape his views regarding sonship. And it is as certainly in the mind of the apostle here. It is the father seeing the son afar off, and having compassion, and running, and falling on his neck, and kissing him; and, instead of placing him among the hired servants, he joyfully gives him the son's place he had forfeited in his father's house, and bestows on him the formal tokens of adoption. So here, to receive Christ implies *the right* to become a son of God.

3. But if this were the whole, it might be an utter

failure after all. Along with the rights of sonship there is needed the spirit of adoption. So there is promised here not only adoption, but also regeneration. And this work of grace is deep and well defined. It is in no way natural, but only and altogether Spiritual and Divine. The Jews boasted that they were Abraham's children, but that did not count with Jesus. He said—'God is able of these stones to raise up children unto Abraham.' This is the very thing He does in this wonderful promise. All else is excluded and for ever swept away. It is hard and humbling doctrine for poor, proud, human nature. Sin may run in the blood, but grace never! It is an unspeakable blessing to be the seed of the righteous. A pious ancestry is a great heritage. To have the blood of martyrs and covenanters in our veins is something to be proud of. But blood, and the flesh, and the will, are all discounted here. Only the new birth will avail. 'It is the Spirit that quickeneth, the flesh profiteth nothing.' 'Marvel not that I said unto you, Ye must be born again.'

All this happens to *as many as* receive Him. There is no qualification, and no limitation, and no exclusion. 'He is able also to save to the uttermost, and for evermore, all that come unto God by Him.' What a tremendous responsibility this lays on *as many as* hear, and have, the Gospel offer! You may have seen Holman Hunt's beautiful picture—Christ the Light of the world. It represents Jesus standing, knocking at a sinner's heart. There, in an old dark doorway, stands 'the Man of Sorrows.' A lantern is in His hand. By the light of it, you discover a strange look of love and goodness in His eye, while a halo of more than earthly glory encircles His

benignant countenance. The light also shows that the door is shut, and that weeds are growing up unchecked, and the ivy is trailing underneath the door, and upward through every crevice. All is dark and gloomy. The threshold is untrodden. It looks like the doorway into some house of the dead. And there, that hand is on the knocker, and as He lifts it, with a look of indescribable sorrow and earnestness, He seems to say—'Behold, I stand at the door and knock'—He may be doing it now!

'Admit Him, for the human breast
Ne'er entertained so kind a guest;
. . . . .
Admit Him, or the hour's at hand,
When, at His door, denied you'll stand.'

XVI

THE GOSPEL OF ACCESS

'For through Him we both have our access in one Spirit unto the Father.'—EPHESIANS ii. 18 (R.V.)

THIS is one of the strong proof-passages in New Testament scripture in support of the doctrine of the Blessed Trinity. The Divine unity—Jehovah—may be accepted as the burden of Old Testament teaching and revelation. When Christ appeared, the light was fuller and clearer. The burden of the New Testament teaching here is the Holy Trinity—Father, Son, and Spirit—*three* Persons in *one* Godhead. This is to human reason a profound mystery, and a seeming contradiction. Nature cannot grasp, or think it. Yet when the doctrine is graciously revealed, it may be reverently and gratefully accepted. For, be it noted, in the Scripture testimony for this high teaching, it is never put forward as a theme for intellectual speculation and discussion; but rather presented to faith in its practical bearings on evangelical truth and Christian experience. It is the manifestation of Jehovah in His personal relations to sinful and fallen men. This is an adaptation very wonderful and blessed; yet such that it were impossible for us, with the limitations of our being, to understand or comprehend, unless under the direct

and individual teaching of God's Spirit. We have to take on trust this Trinity of Persons, and in our own true spiritual experience it is verified and confirmed and made real. And as it grows upon us, in the strain and struggle of Christian believing and living, we gradually come to see that we have Three Divine Friends related to one another, and to us, in such a wonderful way, that all our aspirations and endeavours after a truer and better moral and spiritual life, depend on the heavenly sympathy and help thus extended towards us. And yet the Three are One, as certainly as the One is Three.

But the doctrine of the Trinity is only stated in this sublime and wonderful passage in order to make manifest the greatness of the Divine undertaking. It is the reconciliation of Jew and Gentile to one another, and both of them to God. It means changing moral and spiritual far-offness into nearness, and the alienation of human hearts and lives into truest sympathy and fellowship. The Jew may, in many respects, have advantage over the Gentile; but even a Jew like St. Paul could appreciate the inestimable value of the cross and the blood, so as to render it possible that Christ Jesus 'might create in Himself of the twain one new man, so making peace; and might reconcile them both in one body unto God through the cross, having slain the enmity thereby: and He came and preached peace to you that were far off, and peace to them that were nigh.' We know well enough that the Jew all along enjoyed a favoured and honoured position, as contrasted with the Gentile; and he was accustomed to appreciate it to the full, till it became a snare to him, and ministered to the making of a Pharisee. 'No external evidence is

necessary to prove that the psalmists and the prophets were illuminated and inspired by the Spirit of God. Their happy trust in the Divine goodness, their exultation in the Divine righteousness, the agony of their penitence when they had broken the Divine law, the pathos of their appeal to the Divine mercy, are a sufficient proof that they had heard the voice and seen the face of God. Only the vision of the Divine glory could have created the rapture of their joy; only the loss of that vision could have occasioned the bitter anguish with which, out of the depths of a great despair, they cry to the God who has forsaken them. And still, after the lapse of so many centuries, after changes so vast in the intellectual, the moral, and religious life of mankind, their words soothe our sorrow, quiet our agitation, invigorate faith, and kindle the fires of devout affection. We know that God revealed Himself to them, for through them God reveals Himself to us.'[1]

But the extraordinary fact remains, that the Jew—with all his advantages and privileges—rejected and condemned and crucified the promised Messiah. In the days of His flesh, publicans and sinners gave Christ a heartier welcome than did the members of the Jewish Church. And even now, the Jew is harder to win for Christ than the pagan and the heathen. Morally and spiritually there is such a thing as being near and yet far off; and what might seem to be helpful is not unfrequently a real drag and hindrance. There is a solemn lesson for every one of us here, for modern civilisation claims the preference, and boasts the privilege, and has but little consideration for 'the ignorant, and them that are out of the way.' And

[1] Dale on Ephesians, p. 213.

yet it is only 'through Christ, and in one Spirit, that both have access unto the Father.'

I. There is Exclusion on Account of Sin.

1. There is the action and operation of Divine law. 'So He drove out the man: and He placed at the east of the garden of Eden, Cherubim and a flaming sword which turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life.' The awful rupture had taken place. The old serpent—the tempter—had succeeded in his hellish plot. The relationship of trustful confidence was completely broken up. Consciousness of guilt and shame came over the guilty pair. God had said —'In the day thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.' The covenant was broken. The curse began to take terrible effect. The very scene and associations of the happy garden must needs be obliterated. The covenant life has been forfeited and lost for ever. It implies the winding up of that dispensation. The expulsion of these two first sinners by God Himself, was an intimation that life, and the way to it, were not to be found henceforth in trying to keep the law. Faithless now, and false, and fallen, our great first progenitors are banished as criminals and outlaws. They carry with them the brand and the disgrace of their first transgression, and are shut out from the *tree of life*—a kind of sacrament and symbol of the reward of obedience. This is the exercise of the Divine vengeance against sin. The righteous law is avenging the insult and outrage done to itself. The sinner is driven out of the garden of life, into the wilderness of death.

And that fiery symbol that guards the entrance, and turns every way to keep the way of the tree of

life, gives intimation that the majesty of the Divine law has been wounded. An awful claim has gone forth against the evicted tenants of Eden. So far as law and work and life are linked together, they are hopelessly bankrupt and ruined. It may seem a hard and cruel fate. Strange, that one foolish and sinful deed should involve the ruin of the whole human race! Yet so it is. And surely there is mercy, as well as wrath, in the dread instrument that bars the way back to a lost paradise; for unless the barrier were there, desperate men would persist in their efforts to win their way back, and reclaim and reconstruct their lost heritage. But it is a vain imagination. A new gospel was preached when God 'drove out the man,' but its very foundation and warrant was this—'by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in His sight.'

2. But in addition to the Divine legal enactment, there is also the moral alienation of the human heart from God. A sudden change came over them as soon as our first parents ate the forbidden fruit. They became cowards. They ceased to enjoy the Divine fellowship. Sin brought to the first sinners a guilty sense of shame, and they sought to flee and hide from the presence of God. Now some men try very hard to persuade us that the story of the Fall is mythical and legendary tradition. The best proof of its historic verity, to my mind, is this—it is true to nature. We may not be able fully to appreciate Adam's position, before his fall, but we can all understand him after it happened, and sympathise heartily with him in his efforts to get away from God, and be out of His company. We read that 'Cain went out from the presence of the Lord.' It is moral rather than

material, all this. The distance increases, but it is not to be measured by miles. Who among us can estimate or calculate how far it is possible for an alien soul to get away from God? Scientific men have demonstrated the immense and incalculable distances which obtain in space, and when we try to realise them, they only baffle and bewilder the imagination. But material, is almost as nothing compared with moral and spiritual, distance, which measures the case of those who are alienated from God in heart and soul and sympathy. It is a woful description of Gentile life, as given by St. Paul in this same epistle—'Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who being past feeling, have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.' The sad moral degradation of the heathen world must have profoundly impressed the apostle. It is difficult for us adequately to enter into this impression, or even to give him credit for it. It must have been to him like touching the uttermost fringe of the blackness of darkness. And what a brave and heroic soul he was, the ambition and inspiration and enthusiasm of whose consecrated life was—to be the apostle of the Gentiles. Paul was a Jew—a Hebrew of the Hebrews. He understood full well the great outward advantages enjoyed by his favoured race; and the time was when he would have made it his self-righteous boast. But he has changed his mind. He has come to discover that the comparative nearness of the Jews is formal and artificial and misleading; and, as he takes his stand midway between the Jew so near, and the Gentile so far off, he preaches

the same glorious gospel to both of them, and testifies to the power of the redeeming blood to make them one in Christ Jesus. What makes us marvel, and awakens within us boundless admiration for this great, apostolic, Christlike man, is the fact that he could write down in words the awful, natural character here given of the Gentiles—'That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenant of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world'; and yet had the holy audacity and sublime confidence to preach to them—even to them—the gospel of God's grace! We are, in these times, face to face with the gravest possible danger to true evangelical religion, when men begin to modify, and qualify, and call in question the doctrine of human depravity, and the awful, untold possibilities of moral deterioration and degradation in sinful human nature. Only the frank admission of abounding sin will magnify and glorify abounding grace.

3. But there is still another aspect of this exclusion which it is of great importance to note. The sinner may impose upon himself. He may fondly imagine that he can come nigh to God in formal and artificial acts and exercises of devotion. Prayer is a native instinct of the human soul. Hardly any savage tribe has been found so degraded as not to have the semblance of some divinity, and some religious rites. The Tartar puts his prayer into a cylinder, and the winds of heaven turn the wheel and perform the devotional exercise. The men who caused their children to pass through the fire to Moloch—giving their first-born for their transgression, the fruit of their body for the sin of their soul—beat their drums

to drown the children's heart-rending cries. The Church of Rome makes provision for hired masses and mercenary devotions, relieving its votaries of all further trouble or concern. And many more, who ought to know better, impose upon themselves with fictitious forms and vain penitential drudgeries. 'The notes of a flute,' some one says, 'are sometimes a torture to the ears of idiots, like the blare of a trumpet. The reason has been conjectured to be, that melodious sound unlocks the tomb of idiotic mind by the suggestion of conception, dim, but startling, like a revelation of a higher life, with which that mind has certain crushed affinities, but with which it feels no willing sympathy; so that its own degradation, disclosed to it by the contrast, is seated on the consciousness of idiocy like a nightmare.' May there not be some strange analogy to all this in the experience of natural men in their dim and undefined longings and aspirations after God? The crushed affinities of the soul, overshadowed and darkened and utterly confused by the power of sin, awaken a dismal feeling that turns the true religious instinct into an instrument of positive torture and wretchedness.

There is such a thing as the natural Fatherhood of God. It is common to all His creatures. The man who is content with it must take his place side by side with the ravens and the sparrows. For it is pagan in its origin. Paul quoted it on Mars hill from a Greek poet—'For we are also His offspring.' It is at the best a relationship, not of grace, but only of nature. Nor is it necessary unduly to depreciate this Divine relationship—only we cannot ignore the fact that sin has disturbed and practically destroyed its validity and worth. A sinner has sinned away his

natural rights. He has forfeited all his privileges. It was a fearful thing for Christ to say of the Jews—and yet it was the simple, sober truth—'Ye are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do.' It is passing strange that men should persist in clinging to this figment of the Divine Fatherhood, when the Divine law has taken action of expulsion against them, on account of their guilty deeds; and when their alien disposition has made it plain that in heart they have ceased to be sons altogether. Only as the Holy Spirit comes to convince of sin, and condemnation, and exclusion, and renunciation, will we welcome the Saviour's great message—'I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.'

II. There is Access through Christ Jesus to the Father.

1. *The Incarnation* is a wonderful step towards this design. For it means that Jesus Christ is God in new relations with His creation and His creatures. It is a new revelation, and manifestation, and even a new communication of Himself. In some ways the incarnation is a greater event than the crucifixion. The birth of Christ may be a thing more to be wondered at than His death, and Bethlehem has associations more far-reaching than even Calvary itself. For His coming in the flesh was the bridging of the awful, impassable gulf that had intervened between God and man, on account of sin. And now God and man can meet, and touch, in this wonderful person of Christ. 'Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise took part of the same.' Years ago, a London

journalist made his name famous, because, in miserable disguise, he found his way into the 'casual ward' of the workhouse, and was thus able from experience to describe its horrors. Even so the Son of God is come in form of the Son of man—to seek and save the lost. When William Burns first went as a missionary to China, he found that his only hope of making way among them for the gospel of Christ was, that he should become a Chinaman, living and dressing like them, and identifying himself in every possible way with the associations and interests of their daily life. And this he continued till the day of his death with marvellous success. It has sometimes seemed to me that there is a missing chapter in the Divine story of the prodigal son, and that the incarnation represents Christ leaving home and going into the far country, to seek and find and save and bring back to his father's house again the long-lost wanderer.

2. *It is through the Blood of His Cross.* There is some difference of opinion as to the reference here, but there need be no doubt Christ is represented in 'His obedience unto death,' as reconciling Jew and Gentile to one another, and bringing both of them into the fellowship of a reconciled God and Father. There was a middle wall of partition, or hedge, between them. Perhaps it refers to the wall separating the Court of the Gentiles from the temple proper, to pass which was death to an alien. And then there was the veil shutting them both out from God, till at Christ's death it was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, and the way into the Holiest made manifest. We cannot comprehend the full meaning of the Saviour's death, or explain the necessities

attaching to it, or the far-reaching issues flowing from it. But this we are assured of here—the way to God is no longer barred and bolted. That flaming sword which turned every way to keep the way of the tree of life has sheathed itself in His heart. The alienation and the enmity have been conquered and slain. The Son of man, who has been lifted up on the cross, is now drawing all men unto Himself; and through Him, in His atoning death and peace-speaking blood, they find forgiveness and reconciliation, 'and are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.'

3. *Through His Intercession.* He gives us an introduction. Access indicates presentation to a royal presence. So one of the church fathers writes—'We came not of ourselves, but He brought us in.' Peter in his first epistle has a plain and suggestive way of stating it—and he employs the same word—'Christ also suffered for sins—the just for the unjust—that He might *bring us to God.*' 'Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the Holiest, by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, His flesh; and having an high priest over the house of God: let us draw near, with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water.' You need influence and patronage, and all the forces you can contrive to set in motion, in order to gain access to the great ones of the earth, and it may all end in bitter disappointment and disgust; but oh! what amazing condescension, that He should take our nature, and taste death for every

one of us, and lead us by the hand into the great Presence of our reconciled God and Father, and say —These are the far-off ones who have been brought nigh and brought home! Christ knows the Father, and He knows us. Who shall now dare to challenge our right of access in through the gates into the city and the palace? If they question ours, they question His. It was purchased with blood. It is safe and sure. 'Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.'

III. We both have this Access in one Spirit.

It is an utter impossibility for us to realise to the full, the extent of our alien state and character by nature. Certainly in our attempt to describe it, we only torture human language in vain, and leave the terrible truth unspoken. Only when, 'in one Spirit,' we begin to understand the nearness, through Christ, are we in a position to try to measure the former far-offness and find how incomprehensible it really is. This will be the wonder and the song of the eternal ages; and we, redeemed immortals, shall never come to the end of that mystery of grace and mercy by which we were made nigh.

1. It is the Spirit of *Sonship*. The access is only for the children. Inside the gates of the palace the children of the King have a welcome. There are locks and bars and high walls to keep the strangers and foreigners outside. But the gates fly open, and the spirit and likeness and sympathetic attachment of family life, are the warrant for their children's entrance. The Spirit of adoption is the sphere, and the atmosphere, of their new-born souls. It is the very

instinct and intuition of the new nature. Almost unconsciously, and without effort or struggle—like the needle trembling to the pole—the heart of the child of grace turns towards the heart of its heavenly Father. As the sunflower opens its heart to the sun, and turns towards it and follows it like fond lover and devoted slave; even so, the renewed, regenerated soul turns, by the instinct of grace, towards the Sun of Righteousness, who has arisen with healing in His wings, ministering life and health and loveliness to this new creation of God. 'Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.' 'For as many as are led by the Spirit of God they are the sons of God. And if children, then heirs: heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together.'

'So nigh, so very nigh, to God,
More near I cannot be;
For in the Person of His Son,
I am as near as He!
So dear, so very dear, to God,
More dear I cannot be;
The love wherewith He loves the Son,
Such is His love to me!'

2. It is the Spirit of *Brotherhood.* The spirit of alienation from God finds terrible expression in bitter hatred and ill-will among men. The antipathy of Jew and Gentile was proverbial. It is hard to tell which hated and despised the other most. In the sacramental symbol of the Jewish religion, as good

old Dr. Thomas Goodwin quaintly suggests, each found a nickname for the other. The hate of clans and races finds its culmination in religious hate. And the gulf that separated the proud Hebrew nation from the less favoured nationalities of the world was so wide and deep as to seem absolutely impassable. And yet, through Christ, and in one Spirit, both of them gain a common Fatherhood in God, and found a new brotherhood among men, in which 'neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.' This is the new freemasonry of grace, that makes no account of outward, accidental circumstances whereby men are made to differ. It sweeps all these miserable differences out of the way, and on their ruins lays the foundation of the new family of God, gathered from north and south, east and west—'where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free; but Christ is all, and in all.' May we all be included in this heavenly family circle—this household of God.

3. It is the Spirit of *Devotion*. This strange, rude material, gathered from such unlikely quarters, has a high and holy destiny in store. It is being built into the mystic temple—'for an habitation of God through the Spirit.' Herein is to be found the true secret of Christian consecration. We find our true heart-home in God, and He makes us His habitation and home as well. Far away beyond all outward form and ritual and ceremonial—though these have a place of their own—God and His people dwell together in the atmosphere of worship and fellowship and prayer. Thus the Spirit is given for grace and supplication. He helpeth our infirmities, and

bestows on us the power and wisdom and holy skill, that exercises itself in believing and prevailing prayer. Coming so very near, we know that we have an advocate with the Father in the Divine Son, and an intercessor within us in the Holy Spirit. In this way our highest and truest religious experience is identified with prayer, and we prevail first with God, and then with men. 'Believe me,' said Coleridge to his nephew, two years before his death, 'to pray with all your heart and strength, with the reason and the will, to believe vividly that God will listen to your voice through Christ, and verily do the thing He pleaseth thereupon—this is the best, the greatest achievement of the Christian warfare upon earth—Teach us to pray, Lord.'

'Now unto Him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto Him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever. Amen.'

XVII

EVEN IN SARDIS

'Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with Me in white: for they are worthy.'—REV. iii. 4.

AMONG all the seven churches in Asia, Sardis, next to Laodicea, bears the worst character. There is no complaint as to difficulties due to external circumstances. There is no heresy, or idolatry, or persecution, or spiritual conflict of any kind whatsoever. Everything seems to have been favourable, and comfortable. They had become possessed with a spirit of miserable and unworthy self-complacency. Even their enemies leave them to themselves, and they are permitted to enjoy a peaceful and untroubled life. Yet this peaceful aspect of things outwardly, was utterly hollow and unreal. It was the peace of death. To be so completely free from trouble was a great misfortune. Their outward evenness and prosperity was their snare. It lulled them into carnal security, and spiritual death. For a church, as for an individual, it may often form the greatest trial possible, to be free from trial altogether. For here, 'He that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars, saith: I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.'

Death is a terrible reality. We look into a dead

human face with subdued and solemnised feelings. And indeed we cannot long endure it. We are all in full sympathy with Abraham when he said—'Give me a possession of a burying-place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight.' Beside the hospice at the top of the Great St. Bernard Pass, the traveller finds a pathetic and terrible spectacle. The victims that perish in the snowstorm, while crossing the wild mountain-pass, are preserved, as found, for identification. It is a ghastly and melancholy sight, and can never be forgotten. The place is more than eight thousand feet above the sea-level, and the form and features long retain their natural appearance. But it is a painfully revolting and horrible thing. What, then, are we to think or say of this dead church in Sardis? Death is masked, and dressed up, and galvanised into what has the aspect and seeming of life. Regarded from the outside, and in the distance, everything is apparently real, and warm with life; but on a nearer view, and with a closer scrutiny, it is cold and stiff and dead. Can it be a challenge to death, and an attempt to mock it away; or is it an attempt to give the lie to everything like life? We may well start back awe-stricken, as we gaze on such a scene as this. Death and life are both so solemn and sacred, that we cannot afford to deceive, or be deceived, as to either. There are in this world of ours many great imitations, and impositions, and deceptions, and falsehoods. There is the hectic flush of consumption, which imitates the rosy cheek of childhood. There is the maniac's wild laugh, so like the light and happy smile of youth and innocence. And there is here the awful fact of death, so like to life as to

be mistaken for it. Others thought too well of them, and they thought too well of themselves; but God washes away the paint—He tears off the mask—and reveals to all concerned the true and terrible situation of this church in Sardis—stark and cold in death.

In such a sad case this wonderful text finds for us its charm and fascination. It is like a brilliant diadem in a dark setting. Or like some rare picture—the background is painted dark with death, the better, by contrast, to enhance and glorify the central idea of life. It is to this we are now to give our attention. We shall find for our edification and consolation, that the few who were living and loyal to Christ in such depressing and difficult circumstances, are always considered by Him, and receive honourable mention. 'He who holds the seven stars in His right hand, and walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks,' will constantly keep them 'as the apple of His eye,' and give them full credit and enduring recognition and reward for being faithful among the faithless.

I. Consider Christ's estimate of the *faithfulness* of the few. 'Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments.'

1. There were only *a few*. This little group had not much to signalise their position, or to sustain their contention and protest, in faithless, loveless, lifeless Sardis. Very likely they were regarded with suspicion and distrust by those around them. They may have been depreciated and despised, because they were weak as to numbers and wanting in influence, both in the church and the good society of this once splendid and fashionable capital of Lydia.

They were the Puritans and Nonconformists of their day and generation, who had the courage of their convictions, and refused to follow the multitude to do evil. And few though they were, they rallied to the standard of their Christ and King, taking up their cross and bearing it after Him. The little company were drawn and knit together in mutual sympathy. The Spirit had been quenched in the church, but they drew close together, and kept the holy fire burning. That brave little band must have left a deep mark on the men of their time. They must have troubled and rebuked them that were 'at ease in Zion.' A few stars in a dark and dreary night, here and there, easily and soon counted, may render valuable service, and greatly help to relieve the darkness. And you may be sure the reality of their religious life was severely tested in such an unhallowed atmosphere. A hypocrite could not long have stood such a strain. It looks almost like a miracle that there should have been saints in Cæsar's household; and yet since there were, you may depend on it, they were good and true. The very worst environment may contribute largely to the making of the best Christian character; and God's Blessed Spirit often employs adverse influences to work out the sanctifying process in saintly lives.

God's cause has nearly always been in the keeping of a small minority; and numbers have never been of much account with Him. Napoleon was mistaken altogether when he said Providence was always on the side of the big battalions. It is the other way. 'Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.' 'Fear not, thou worm Jacob, and ye men of Israel: I will help

thee, saith Jehovah, and thy Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel.' And in the midst of this apparently unequal and uncertain struggle, it is indeed a grand assurance, that this obscure and insignificant handful is in His eye, and in His thoughts, and on His heart. He Himself will be their shield and safeguard. He will suffer no man to do them wrong; yea, He will reprove kings for their sakes. And they can turn their very weakness into strength, when they learn the blessed secret of uniting their hearts in devotion. While the others restrain prayer before God, their cry is heard in heaven. They assume a priestly function, and become the Lord's remembrancers and intercessors. A few living souls in a dead church, perhaps only one or two in a home or a family, a single heart loyal and true to Christ in school, or workshop, or counting-house, or office, will certainly be cared for and vindicated by Him. It might equally well be recorded of the faithful few in Sardis, as of those who acted the same heroic part in the dark days of Malachi, concerning whom it is finely said—'Then they that feared the LORD spake often one to another: and the LORD hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before Him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon His name. And they shall be mine, saith the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels; and I will spare them as a man spareth his own son who serveth him. Then shall ye return, and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth Him not.'

2. A few *names*. He knows and highly appreciates the faithful little band as a whole. But He does not stop there. His affectionate regard is far more pene-

trating, and personal. One by one they pass in review before Him, and He knows their individual names. 'He calleth His own sheep by name, and leadeth them out.' It reminds us of the breastplate of the high priest in Israel. Over his heart he wore the gems on which were engraven the names of the twelve tribes, and when he went into the Holy of Holies, 'he bore their judgment on his heart before the Lord.' So our great High Priest, who has gone to appear in the presence of God for us, carries with Him most faithful and affecting remembrance of every one of His ransomed people, and knows their distinctive and personal names, and all they represent in connection with gracious exercise and experience. And a suggestion made by some expositors is reasonable and likely enough—that the name here had peculiar significance on account of their circumstances. The church had a name, and was well known and highly regarded among men. But the name and the thing did not correspond. Their religious profession and their real character were not in harmony. They had a name that was only a falsehood and a sham. But there were a few whose names were the symbol for life, and truth, and faithfulness. Their names were more than names, for they had both the form of godliness and its power. The name and the thing verified one another. The name Sardis had, was altogether false. The few names in it were altogether true.

Let us take note here how real, and personal, is God's knowledge of His people. He takes us aside one by one, and marks us off from all other men. He has in His great heart and home, a separate and peculiar place for each believing soul. I have heard

it said that Cæsar knew every soldier in his great army. You can understand what power a faculty like this must have given him, with his proud Roman legions, when he could speak to, and recognise, and name each one as he passed in review, or on the march, or in the field of battle, before him. It seems a thing almost incredible and impossible. But in any case, we can well assure ourselves that God certainly knows the name of every child in His kingdom. There is not one of us all but has a personal tie binding Him and us together. He knows us, and has a name for us; and we know Him, and have a name for Him. One of the most cruel necessities of prison discipline is the law that takes away the prisoner's name, and gives him a number instead, as the only symbol by which he shall be known and distinguished from all the rest of that dismal prison-world. The bars and bolts and iron grating of his narrow cell, shut him out remorselessly from all intercourse and fellowship with men; but the substitution of a number for his old familiar name separates him for weeks, or months, or it may be for long years together, from his former, better self, and makes for him a dreary, desolate, cast-metal kind of existence—destitute of the poetry and sympathy and humanity, and even of the proper personality of life. Verily, it is a horrible, penal discipline; and it is a grave and doubtful question whether it is not fitted to demoralise the unhappy prisoner, and destroy all the finer and better instincts of the criminal, and blight the last faint possibilities of his ever being reclaimed and reformed! In the dispensation of the Divine grace, certainly, this name and tender personal relationship has a mysterious but marvellous power.

It brings God and the sinner very near, and very close to one another. The personality and individuality of the tie are wonderfully helpful. When you get a sinner seriously to listen to this gospel, and apprehend its real meaning, you have gone a long way to disarm his suspicion and win his confidence. You can tell him God knows his life and history and heart, and that He is familiar with his very name. He knows him not only as one among the many, and not even as one of the few, but as all alone and by himself. He knows him as none other does; as he does not even know his own personal existence and name. God has a name for him that covers all his past and present and future. And because of all this knowledge, His whole discipline of grace is now definitely ordered and arranged, and will in the end accomplish its glorious and blessed purpose. 'But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and He that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, *I have called thee by thy name*, thou art mine. When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not overflow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee.'

3. 'A few names *which have not defiled their garments*.' The true dividing line between the old and the new life of these early Christians was naturally associated with their baptism. They were largely converts from heathenism, and in this initial rite they proclaimed the renunciation of the old pagan life and name. Wearing white garments, and assuming a new, a Christian name, they came to the ordinance which in its truest meaning symbolised and sealed sacra-

mentally 'the washing of regeneration and the renewing of the Holy Ghost.' It is hardly possible to get at the origin of this significant and now sacred ceremonial. It seems plain that it was in common practice, both among Jews and Gentiles, long before the days of John the Baptist. All over the world of early civilisation, there prevailed lustrations and washings of some certain religious value. And even far beyond, there have been found traces of this ritual, associated with a meaning so human and beautiful as to be almost Christian. 'A tribe of Indians on the Mississippi, on the first day of the year, assemble and plunge into the river, and rise to begin a new life. This ceremony is called the *Bushkiton*. No quarrel is allowed to survive that act. Should any one, after that, attempt to rake up a former feud, he is at once reminded that the water has quenched the last spark of animosity. Should any one allude to any unworthy act of any member of the tribe, which occurred before the ceremony took place, he is silenced at once. 'He has passed the *Bushkiton*.' Every one reckons himself 'dead indeed unto all the errors of his past life. He rises from that plunge to "walk in newness of life."'[1]

The baptism of *John* was the adoption and adaptation of a familiar rite, to a new purpose—the inspiration of a new ideal. It was a solemn pledge to break with the guilty past, and leave it all behind. Those who came to it were committed to forswear and forgo all the evil and unworthy elements in their character; and to address themselves resolutely to 'the tedious, taxed toil of the difficult long endeavour'

[1] Feather, *The Last of the Prophets*, p. 80.

after righteousness. It was the baptism with water unto repentance. But it had in it the added elements of consecration, and expectation. It was only provisional and preparatory. The baptism with water was only the prelude of the Messianic manifestation, and the baptism with the Holy Ghost, and with fire. The water and the fire then came to be linked together; and the true significance of the sacrament, in gospel days, was cleansing by the blood, and quickening by the Spirit. We are thus enabled fully to appreciate the perilous situation of the faithful few in Sardis, arrayed in the symbolic white garments of their baptism. 'Their first young love of heaven' was to be subjected to a severe and terrible strain. Many had succumbed to pressure all around them. The stream of tendency was the wrong way. But the brave and courageous few held their ground, and 'kept themselves unspotted from the world.' We must not, however, hastily conclude that these saints were immaculate and perfect. Theirs was not the 'white raiment' of glory here promised as the clothing of those that overcome: but rather the white garments of grace, which run great risk of pollution, when brought into contact with the filth and foulness of this present evil world. The defilement implied in the word here used is of the deepest and most offensive kind; and the few that had not defiled the white garments of their baptism, had been graciously preserved from open contact with foul and flagrant pollution. It is not to be supposed they were entirely free from the spots and stains of sin; but they lived so near the light, that if they were in contact with sin at any time, and caught its contagion, they were at once made aware of it; and they lived so near the

blood, that, so soon as they made the discovery that they were sin-stained, they sought the fountain and were cleansed. They never gave time for the filth to become hardened and engrained. As we behold and admire their attitude of watchfulness and integrity, they are busy washing their robes and making them 'white in the blood of the Lamb.'

Thus in believing they received a new nature, and in baptism they received a new name—a name written in heaven. They have crossed the Rubicon, and left the old carnal life behind them. And, in doing so, they have begun the upward, onward struggle, which, in the hand of Him who hath the seven Spirits of God, shall eventually accomplish the full completeness and perfection of their moral character, and take end only when they are led 'in through the gates into the city,' with garments undefiled.

4. And they did this in Sardis—'*even in Sardis*'—where there was so much to defile, and so many that were defiled and defiling. It would have been honourable, and creditable, and beautiful, anywhere; but much more here, surely, where the difficulties, and dangers, and evil examples, are rife and rampant! It is the case of those who are compelled to walk through muddy streets, and miry places, and who need to gather up, and gird securely, their loose-flowing garments, and choose with watchful care their every step. The splendid compliment here paid to them is enhanced unspeakably, by this frank admission of the greatness of the difficulties attaching to the situation. Our Lord seems almost to be agreeably surprised and disappointed. It is as if more and better than even He had expected. It is to Him the occasion for admiring wonder, and sincere commendation. Their

quiet, determined struggle with evil, in a time of such general defection, and when the odds were so decidedly against them, is appreciated and accredited to the very uttermost; and their devotion has associated their names with amaranthine fame.

Have you never found yourselves in circumstances in which your religion threatened to go to the wall? I must have heard some of you say you were in a position in which it was all but impossible to be a Christian—in your daily life, at your business or your work, among neighbours or companions or friends, in your home and among your family. Now you may deserve full credit for the difficulties that surround you, and threaten the destruction of your piety. It may demand of you unceasing struggle, and endless watching, and great grace. Nevertheless, it is not impossible. The thing has been done—even in Sardis. If anywhere, just where God, in His providence and grace, has given you your place and service, your religious life must grow and thrive and flourish. If you lose heart, and let your faith fail, and give up the testimony for God, and truth, and righteousness, then you may reckon yourselves miserable cowards; and you may be certain the faithful few in Sardis will rise up in the Judgment to condemn you. On the other hand, it is strong consolation to have the full Divine warrant for believing that none 'goeth a warfare any time at his own charges.' There is a singular and unmistakable tone of kindliness and tender human sympathy in this—'even in Sardis.' You are building on solid rock when you come to the conclusion that if you have a stern battle to fight, God knows all about it, and will give grace to help in time of need; if you have a cruel and unwelcome cross to bear, He

Himself will carry the heavy end of it, and help you with your end as well. For, it is as true still as it was in the olden time—'Thy shoes shall be iron and brass, and as thy days thy strength shall be.'

II. There is the REWARD for faithfulness—'They shall walk with me in white: for they are worthy.' We have here a great galaxy of golden promises all gathered into one fair harmony. It looks almost like sacrilege to touch these exquisitely beautiful words. It is as if one were to begin to dissect a rose and cut it in pieces, in order to discover the mysterious secret of its fragrance. For, 'as it is written—Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him'; and yet, if we put off our shoes, and cherish the spirit of lowly reverence and awe, we may be privileged to gaze within the veil, and to spell out, and interpret, and covet earnestly for ourselves, the glorious reward prepared in heaven, as the reward for a saintly life on earth.

1. They shall *walk*. This implies *life*—spiritual and eternal life in Christ. Only those endowed with the energies and activities of the life hid with Christ in God, can claim this heritage of heaven. The dead lie still, and sleep on in the cold embrace of the tomb. But here is promised to those who maintained spiritual life and power, in the heart of a dead church in Sardis, resurrection-life in heaven. It is the life which is to be the portion and high prerogative of the redeemed, when Christ, who is their life, shall appear: for then shall they also appear with Him in glory. It means *liberty*. For only those who are free can walk. This must be the full fruition and enjoyment

of the liberty wherewith Christ makes His people free—the glorious liberty of the children of God. What a revelation it must have been to the vain heathen despot, when he saw four men, loose, walking in the midst of the burning, fiery furnace! Each one for whom this high destiny is in store, shall be the heir of freedom—no bands or bonds or grave-clothes there. And it assures us also of *progress.* Christ's life on earth was a walk. From Bethlehem to Golgotha, and out as far as to Bethany, there was one long, even, uninterrupted pathway of progress. All through He was animated and inspired by a holy earnestness, and had before Him a definite plan and purpose in life. Sad to think of the utterly inadequate conception of life's meaning and motive which most men cherish! They are either too fast, or too slow. It is either a wild, impetuous rush, or a long, lazy drag of heartless, aimless, joyless drudgery. The true life is business-like and resolute and progressive. 'Christ steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem.' It was a determined, consecrated walk. In our own poor way we try to follow His steps, and imitate His fair example down here. It is fitful and halting and limping at the best. Over yonder, in the land of life and liberty and progress,—'they shall walk.'

2. They shall *walk with Me.* 'Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold my glory, which Thou hast given Me.' 'I have a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is very far better.' This involves familiar and confidential friendship, companionship, fellowship. In a certain sense and measure we walk with Him, and He with us down here; yet how broken and fitful is it, even when at the best! We

are as if in a great crowd, and in the crush and pressure, we loose sight of each other, and for long intervals part company. Our walk with Christ, by faith, and in the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, is often rudely broken in upon and interrupted. It is indeed a hard struggle to keep time and tune with 'the melodies of the everlasting chime.' But the broken glimpses and momentary snatches of this high communion make for us 'days of heaven upon earth.' 'We do not know the half of what we love when we love Christ,' says Samuel Rutherford, but we shall have eternal ages in which to learn new lessons, and make fresh discoveries, in the realms of Divinest love and intercourse. We shall see His face. We shall hear His voice. We shall keep step together; and, side by side, He and we shall walk the golden streets of the New Jerusalem.

3. *In white.* This is the emblem of the unsullied purity and holiness of the heavenly state. 'There shall in no wise enter into it anything that defileth.' 'These who are arrayed in the white robes, who are they, and whence came they? These are they which came out of the great tribulation, and they washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God.' Perfect purity is the alone condition of citizenship there. There could be no real sympathy, or fellowship, otherwise. For all is whiteness there. White is the colour of heaven. The great white throne is there—the throne of God and of the Lamb. And this gives law and rule and regulation to everything beside. The white robe of the Redeemer's spotless righteousness is still the holy enswathement of the blood-washed and the purified. But beneath it is to be found the

new heart and the white character and the transfigured life. For, in truth, the transfiguration scene on earth was merely 'the pattern of things in the heavens.' Then, 'His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light.' 'And His raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them.' In that great white world of light, we shall all be transformed, and conformed to the image of God's Son; and we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is.' Then God's redeemed 'shall be all righteous'; and they shall walk with Christ in white.

4. *For they are worthy.* We are not for a moment to imagine that this means salvation by good works. It is all of grace: and shall for ever be 'to the praise of the glory of His grace.' Their worthiness did not gain heaven for them. Christ did that. Nor did they make white their sin-stained robes, without the cleansing virtue of the blood of the Lamb. But they are worthy, because they esteemed Christ so highly, and learned to sing the new song—'Worthy is the Lamb.' They are counted worthy, because they deemed themselves so unworthy. As poor lost sinners they found their way to Christ, and made Him their righteousness; and He became their strength as well; so that, in the midst of great defilement, they were enabled to keep their garments clean, and witness a good confession before both the church and the world. These efforts were not perfectly successful, but they got credit for their sincerity, and devotion to the perfect and pure ideal. Their very struggles strengthened their character, and made them better men; and at the end the cross makes way for the crown. They gain their rich and ample reward when

they find themselves 'without fault before the throne of God'—walking with Christ in white and counted worthy. May it all be yours and mine!

'Now unto Him that is able to guard you from stumbling, and to set you before the presence of His glory, without blemish in exceeding joy, to the only God our Saviour, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and power, before all time, and now, and unto all the ages. Amen.'

XVIII

THE GREAT HARVEST-HOME

'And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'—MATT. viii. 11, 12.

THE text from which Christ preached this remarkable and memorable sermon was the faith of the Roman centurion whose slave He healed. And certainly he must have been a singularly beautiful character. A Roman soldier might have been counted on for brave and heroic spirit, but it is an agreeable surprise to find him a man of piety and prayer. We are at once favourably impressed with this man in authority, when we discover the kindly and considerate relation in which he stood to this trusted confidential servant and faithful slave. In later days, under St. Paul's influence and ministry, there were saints in Cæsar's household, and they must have had the courage of their convictions, and contributed their share in spreading the evangel. Perhaps this hard and rough Roman soldier was won over to the Jewish religion, because this poor sick slave was to him a notable example of fidelity and devotion, that filled him with wonder and admiration. And in this way the grace of God began to work in his own heart. It showed

itself in his attachment to the Jewish community, among whom he had an official appointment. For they became at once interested in his case, and acted the part of intercessors, and said 'that he was worthy for whom He should do this; for he loveth our nation, and hath built us a synagogue.' It has been well and truly said—'We are never more in the true spirit of prayer ourselves than when we set great value on the prayers of others; and our suit with the Lord never succeeds better than when we engage others to pray on our behalf: especially if we can secure from any that live near to Christ an "instant beseeching" like that of these Jewish elders.'[1]

But, proud Roman though he was, his faith in Christ took deep root in the soil of genuine humility. What a high and reverent conception of Christ's character and mission he must have cherished, and how lowly his estimate of himself must have been, when he owned that he was unworthy to come to Christ in his great extremity, or that Christ should come to him, and be under his roof! The Son of the carpenter must have grown great, and glorious, and Divine, in his estimation. Verily, his attitude is truly wonderful when he says—'Lord, trouble not Thyself: for I am not worthy that Thou shouldest come under my roof: wherefore neither thought I myself worthy to come unto Thee: but say in a word, and my servant shall be healed.' We are told that our Lord 'marvelled' at two things that were exactly opposite—Jewish unbelief, and Gentile faith. It was to Him a blessed relief to turn away from the cruel suspicion with which 'His own' regarded Him, to find a stranger truly trusting and

[1] Dr. Moody Stuart, *Capernaum*, p. 144.

acknowledging Him. He seems to have lingered lovingly on the very borderland of heathenism, as if glad to seize and win, thus early, splendid trophies of grace, and find comfort and encouragement in spite of Jewish hate and rejection. Hence the honour He bestowed on the woman of Tyre who made good her claim to the crumbs, and to whom He granted her heart's desire. Hence, too, His exquisite joy when certain Greeks came inquiring and saying—'Sir, we would see Jesus.' 'The hour is come,' Jesus joyfully responded, 'that the Son of man should be glorified.' The veil is drawn aside, and we read His heart of love. This is the joy set before Him, for which He endured the cross and despised the shame. And here, also, the confession of such faith on the part of a Gentile soldier, so profoundly impressed and moved Him, that He exclaimed, in admiring wonder, as He answered his prayer—'Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel.' And, encouraged and cheered by such ingathering of the first-fruits of Gentile faith, His holy imagination is kindled with devout enthusiasm and expectation, and He opens world-wide the door of mercy, and welcomes the wanderers home. 'He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied.'

1. The Home. There is in human nature a certain vague consciousness of having been cheated and defrauded here. We all have our start in life at home. The kindliest and tenderest associations of a lifetime twine round it, and give it character. 'Heaven lies about us in our infancy.' Yet slowly and gradually it ceases to keep us in possession, till at length we come to realise its unspeakable value, because it is

lost and gone from us for ever, and now only lingers in our memory and lives in our heart. And this tender feeling carries with it a regretful sense of loss. Robert L. Stevenson puts it in his own exquisitely quaint and beautiful way when he speaks of it as 'a chapter in the life of that little, beautiful brother whom we once all had, and whom we have all lost and mourned: the man we ought to have been, the man we hoped to be.' This feeling of homelessness, and unfulfilled ideal, grows upon us with the years, and we are instinctively carried back to our lost home and inheritance in Eden. We may dream fondly of being able to recover the loss, and reclaim and reproduce the blessedness. But, while it may live long and assume fantastic shapes in the imagination, we are helplessly drifting further away from it every day.

And yet this loss may have gain in the heart of it after all. It may only be the necessary condition in the development of a higher and better life. It may be but a mysterious chapter in the new evolution of the human ideal. These deep, undefined yearnings of the empty heart and the hungry soul, are far too exacting and ambitious to be satisfied with anything we have lost and left behind. This orphan family, this outcast race, claims kindred with the Unseen and the Eternal. Manhood has about it still the image and superscription of the Divine workmanship. Sin has marred the fair features of the heavenly likeness, but it is still there. And this insatiable craving for the unrealised possibilities of happiness and blessedness, cannot surely be destined to mock us in our misery for evermore! It may be but the signature of lost greatness and goodness, and the pledge, that,

in the end of God's eternal purpose, they shall be found again.

> 'Thou wilt not leave us in the dust:
> Thou madest man, he knows not why;
> He thinks he was not made to die;
> And Thou hast made him: Thou art just.'

'Such,' says Newman, 'are the feelings with which men look back on their childhood. . . . They are full of affectionate thoughts towards their first years. But they do not know why. They think it is those years which they yearn after, whereas it is the presence of God, which, as they now see, was then over them, which attracts them. They think they regret the past, when they are but longing after the future. It is not that they would be children again; but that they would be angels, and would see God.'

2. *Coming* HOME. The dear old homestead among the hills is broken up. The cottage is in ruins. The hearthstone is cold and empty. The family is parted now, and scattered far and wide. They have turned every one to his own way. Each has taken his portion and gone away and set up for himself. The hard, cold, heartless, business-like way in which the gay youth in the parable 'gathered all together,' and went away, is true to nature—terribly true. Sin drives the sinner away from home. He must be off to the far country, as fast and as far as he possibly can. He wants freedom and independence. The further away from all restraint, the better his chance of full scope for enjoying himself. It will be the very delirium of pleasure. He was only a child at home; he will be a full-grown man now that it is so very far away. The luxury of youth and manhood, with the passionate energies of being

surging through his soul, carries him forward on his journey with boundless confidence. Life's morning is bright and young. Health and strength and youthful energy make light of long miles and high mountains. And then, gold in plenty fills his purse, so that he need want for nothing. This spendthrift life may last a good while. So long as your own resources hold out, you may with all confidence count on plenty of good cheer and good fellowship. But in the end of the day these will fail, and the dismal outlook will be—desertion, and famine, and want, and hunger, and the swine-trough. They tell us of strange devices men try, to staunch the cruel cravings of hunger and thirst. A soldier once described his experience during a desert march in Egypt. He assured me that ordinary mortals at home knew almost nothing of the torture these things really mean. We have never been truly hungry or thirsty. These men were glad to carry a flat pebble in the mouth, to cool the parched tongue, for days together. If hunger finds no supply, it comes at length to turn in upon itself, and gnaw the hungry man to death. The profligate's case is pictured to us, in that the very necessities of the natural and physical existence were not found, so that he says—'I perish with hunger.' Yet that is only an outside view. There is something far worse behind. Longfellow terribly enough defines it thus—

> 'A millstone and a human heart, are driven ever round;
> If they have nothing else to grind, they must themselves be ground.'

But when things have become desperate, hope begins to dawn on his darkened, sin-maddened soul. Thoughts of home, and the plenty there, even among

the slaves, only intensifies the misery and shame of his wasted life. Low down though he be, there are instincts, and affinities, and fond memories, that still bind him to his old home and fatherland. When the madman came 'to himself,' his first thoughts were about his father. He must arise and go to him. Strange, that all his headlong career had never quite obliterated the lingering associations of the past! And when they come to take possession of him, they lift him up, and carry him back again, over the long weary miles between him and his home. The meeting with his father, and the forgiving welcome he receives, breaks his heart into penitential tenderness, and gives a new meaning to his sin and folly. The difficulty is to bring home conviction of sin. A sinner is well on his way back when he resolves to make the frank admission—'Father, I have sinned.' It needs courage and manliness to come and say that great word. Sin has bruised and mauled and battered him so completely, that he hardly needs to own it. But the wretch who has tramped his way home to God finds a new meaning in most things. Old things have passed away, all things are become new. For the gospel of grace has reached a withered heart and filled it with God; and the tired wanderer has found himself at home, for the Spirit has fulfilled Christ's great word of welcome in his experience—'Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.'

3. *Coming* FROM AFAR. The north and south and east and west here, may be understood literally and geographically. God 'hath made of one blood all nations of men, for to dwell on all the face of the earth.' The Jews in their miserable, narrow-hearted

exclusiveness had no room for 'sinners of the Gentiles.' St. Paul had to fight a stiff battle with them wherever he went—proving that the middle-wall of partition was broken down. It is painful and pitiful to think how prone men are to narrow down the broad sweep of the kingdom of heaven, and to set up castes claiming a monopoly of the grace of God. And this gracious assurance, from the Saviour's own lips, is enough to hearten and inspire those who may be in the background. It is only another way of telling us that 'God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation he that feareth Him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with Him.' We are forcibly reminded just now of the wonderful circumstances that led to the introduction of Christianity into our own land. Men are making pilgrimages to Iona, to commemorate the mission of St. Columba and the great issues that have come of it. And many are reminding us also of the early mission of Augustine, sent by Pope Gregory I. to convert the Anglo-Saxons to Christianity, and who became the first Archbishop of Canterbury. About the time Christ uttered these memorable words, our ancestors were performing the superstitious rites of the Druids, and offering human sacrifices, and were little better than savages. Since such a marvellous, gracious change has been effected in this far-off island of the sea, we dare not now despair of any dark lands or dark hearts in all the world. There is room for men of every colour, and every clime in the great heart of God; and, though the enterprise of the world's conversion is as yet only in its infancy, and is only now beginning to take hold of the imagination and the conscience and the heart of the church, yet there have already been

won bright trophies of grace from almost every nation under heaven; and we may with confidence expect that with a fresh Spiritual awakening, there will come a new missionary enthusiasm and response to the Divine call—'Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.' For the holy city, the new Jerusalem, lieth four-square, and hath twelve gates, three on every side—east, and north, and south, and west—and they stand open night and day. 'And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst, come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.'

But this promise may be interpreted in view of the religious divisions and differences to be found among men. God is gathering out His own from among all the creeds, and all the churches. He is pouring contempt on men who constitute themselves the judges and champions of truth and goodness, and excommunicate all that differ from them. Their narrow, provincial, parochial notions must not, and cannot prevail. We are called to mourn over the sections and divisions and sub-divisions of the professing friends and followers of Christ; but we may take comfort from the fact that there is an ingathering, and a home-coming, from among them all. We can all sympathise with the old Puritan preacher who said that he expected to find three very wonderful things in heaven, if by the grace of God he should ever get there. First, many absent whom he had expected to be there; second, many there whom he had never hoped to see; and third and greatest wonder of all, to find himself there!

But it has also a bearing on the moral and social differences that obtain among the sons of men. We have among us the classes and the masses. The Pharisees and the publicans are with us still. Sometimes social distinctions are of the most artificial and contemptible character. Nothing awakened the indignation and scorn of our Blessed Lord so much as this. It was the occasion of His most awful woes and warnings. And they apply still. The Countess of Huntingdon thanked God for the wonderful letter M, for it turned not *any* into not *many*, in the word of warning—'Not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble are called'; and that thus a place had been found by sovereign grace for her! It is also gloriously true that grace can pluck brands out of the fire, and take the beggar from the dunghill. We can cherish hope for any living man or woman, though sunk into the lowest depths of sin and degradation, and seemingly out there on the very rim of perdition. We dare not despair concerning any one that lives. What a sublime and inspiring incentive is here presented to every one taking share in the holy enterprise of helping God to 'gather together the outcasts of Israel'!

> 'Down in the human heart, crush'd by the tempter,
> Feelings lie buried that grace can restore:
> Touch'd by a loving hand, waken'd by kindness,
> Chords that were broken will vibrate once more.'

4. MANY *shall come.* I once heard a good, old, saintly minister say that there was only one flaw in an otherwise perfect little book—the Shorter Catechism. The flaw consisted of one single word—wherein God is represented as 'having, out of His mere good pleasure and from all eternity, elected *some*

to everlasting life.' He complained of this as miserably meagre, and inadequate, and unworthy; and as fitted to discourage and trouble seeking souls, inquiring the way to Zion. He would have stated it in this form—'A great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues.' Perhaps it is unreasonable thus severely to criticise the stinted Gospel of the Westminster Divines, who compiled this splendid little book, which has been an unspeakable blessing to Scotland; but I cannot help wondering it did not occur to them to employ this Scripture word of Christ Himself, and say '*many*,' rather than '*some*'! This view of things ought to enlarge our sympathies, and rebuke our bigotries, and awaken within us large-heartedness and gladdening hopefulness, in our conception of the scope and issues of Christ's redemption-work. Elijah lost heart over what he regarded as the utter failure of his prophetic work in Israel. He wanted God to give him leave to die. But what must have been his amazement when he was assured—at the very time when he complained that he was left alone—that God had reserved to himself seven thousand men who had not bowed the knee to Baal. Let us comfort our hearts, and be of good cheer in midst of much to depress and discourage. 'The kingdom of God cometh not with observation.' 'All the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God.' 'In my Father's house are *many* mansions.' '*Many* shall come.'

5. *Coming home to* REST. 'They shall sit down in the kingdom of heaven.' The home-coming of the soul to God, leads on to the home-going to rest in heaven. When Christ was on the way home, He

often found Himself speaking of it as if He were already there. And when His people come home to the moral and spiritual rest of faith, they 'sit with Him' even now 'in the heavenlies.' But heaven is a place as well as a state. Heaven comes to us as a state, and we go to it as a place. The one is the pledge of, and the title-deed to, as also the preparation for, the other. 'I go to prepare a place for you'—while you are left behind that the Spirit may purify and sanctify and prepare you for the place. 'And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.'

Looked at from our side the home-going has a certain gloom and forbidingness associated with it. We naturally cling to our loved ones, and are loath to let them go, even when the summons comes from heaven. Did we but consider ourselves less, and them and their interests more, we might many a time be less reluctant to let them go, and have our sorrow turned into joy, in view of their departing 'to be with Christ, which is very far better' (R. V.). To my mind the stately trappings of woe, and the sable garments associated with the grave, and mourning for the blessed dead—asleep in Jesus—are sadly out of place. It is about a year now since I visited a girl of thirteen on her deathbed. She was strong in faith, and full of sweet and simple confidence. Her testimony was very clear and comforting; and to me it has ever since been singularly inspiriting and helpful. On the day of her funeral the coffin and hearse and flowers were all white—strikingly symbolic and suggestive of a little, clean, white, blood-washed soul gone home to God; and there singing in the happy confidence of

her purified being, and completed destiny—'Thou wilt show me the path of life; in Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures for evermore.' One would like to indulge the hope, that Christian men and women generally, will some day soon be led to cherish a brighter outlook regarding the dead saints of God, and seek to dissociate their faith and hope—even in the day of mourning and sorrow—from the grim and gloomy sentiments and practices, that are essentially heathen and pagan.

The conception we form concerning the heavenly state, will take shape very largely in keeping with our earthly circumstances and experiences. In the 'many mansions' will be found adaptation to the fulfilment of each one's longings and desires. Wilberforce, with the spirit of Christian philanthropy burning in his bosom, thought of heaven as the home of *love.* Robert Hall, who for long years was the victim of painful suffering, and hardly ever could sleep more than an hour or two without awaking in agony, thought of heaven as the place of *rest.* So too, Richard Baxter, a great sufferer from an internal malady, and in almost unceasing physical pain, wrote his great book on the Saints' Everlasting Rest. To most men, tired and worn and weary with the toil and struggle of this mortal life, the sitting down to rest will be sweetly welcome. 'Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord, for they rest from their labours.' This thought should comfort and cheer all who are bearing the burden and heat of the day, and are in danger of fainting and growing weary; and it ought to be a strong incentive to all who have time and opportunity to serve their own generation

by the will of God. The rest and the reward are amply provided for in heaven.

And this rest will be eternal. Nothing shall ever disturb, or bring it to an untimely end. It is to be age-long. Once safely at home again, there will be no new breach in the family-circle of heaven. 'They shall go no more out.' For 'the inhabitants shall be all righteous.' 'And there shall be no more sea.' For God Himself shall wipe away their tears 'with His own napkin,' and stop their crying, and pain, and mourning; and neither death nor night shall be found there. 'The sun shall be no more thy light by day; neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee: but the LORD shall be unto thee an everlasting light, and thy God thy glory. Thy sun shall no more go down; neither shall thy moon withdraw itself; for the LORD shall be thine everlasting light, and the days of thy mourning shall be ended.'

6. *Coming home to good* FELLOWSHIP. 'They shall sit down with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.' Now we do not need to trouble ourselves with metaphysical speculations as to what Isaac Taylor calls 'The Physical Theory of another Life.' Nor need we perplex ourselves with the difficulties of the doctrine concerning the intermediate state. We have here assuring evidence of the immortality of the Old Testament saints. They are gathered home to the kingdom. 'Now that the dead are raised, even Moses showed at the bush, when he calleth the LORD the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. For He is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto Him.' We have full Scripture warrant for believing

and holding firmly that 'the souls of believers are, at their death, made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory.' We are also comforted to know that the children are all safe. Christ said on earth—suffer them to come unto Me, and He has room for them in His heart, and in His church, and in His heaven. If we are to sit down with the Patriarchs, it means intelligent social intercourse and holy fellowship. We shall know and understand one another there much better than we do here. And we shall be in the best society. Oh, what desperate struggles men make down here to get into good society! And how jealous and rigid they come to be in their proud exclusiveness! But you do not need to mind. Even Jesus was not in good society in His day. All along, it has been mostly a hollow, empty sham. But there is a kingdom, and a court, in the land beyond the river, and the ransomed of the Lord are gathering homewards to join the high fellowship of Christ the King of Glory, and all His saints. 'And so shall we ever be with the Lord.' 'Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with me where I am: that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me.'

7. *The children cast out.* It seems hard and harsh that so dark a shadow should overhang such a bright and beautiful picture. Some men would say its effect is to spoil the whole, and take the very heart out of it. But the only question we can raise regarding it is this—is it true? Christ knew the facts of the case. While rejoicing over the faith of Gentiles like this Roman centurion, He was bitterly disappointed with Jewish unbelief and rejection. And He is addressing the children of the kingdom here.

He gives them timely and tender warning of their fearful fate. In the corresponding passage in St. Luke's Gospel, there are some side-lights which give awful meaning to the appeal. Over against the 'many' coming from afar at His call, there are the 'many' who will seek to enter in, and shall not be able. By their own mad infatuation they were bringing about a woful transposition for themselves. 'And, behold, there are last which shall be first, and there are first which shall be last.' And the same day, in proof that His heart of love and pity was breaking over their madness, He uttered in their hearing the pathetic lament—'O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, which killest the prophets, and stonest them that are sent unto thee: how often would I have gathered thy children together, as a hen doth gather her brood under her wings, and ye would not!' What began with deliberate repudiation of the Messiah's Divine claim and heavenly message, settled down eventually into the dark, black night of hopeless judicial blindness. The fact that they were a people near to God in religious privilege and opportunity, became their snare, and their ruin. I once met a newly wedded pair at Banff Springs—a lovely retreat in the heart of the Rocky Mountains—and the bride confessed that, though she had spent all her life in Toronto, almost within sound of the Falls of Niagara, she had never gone to see them. They come in crowds from the very ends of the earth to view this wonder of the world; and yet, just because she was so near it, she never had the curiosity, or took the trouble, or found the time, to go. May not this explain the hackneyed and familiar Scottish proverb—'The nearer the kirk, the farther from grace'? May we be led to take timely

warning, and strive—yea, agonise—to enter in at the strait gate; lest, just because it seems near and open and easy of attainment, we put the opportunity aside, and miss the way to life eternal! 'How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?'

XIX

PRAYING IN THE HOLY GHOST

'Praying in the Holy Ghost.'—JUDE 20.

PRAYER, it is safe to say, is one of the greatest things in the world. What if it be the greatest! Who can tell? It has, indeed, a poor and small beginning in the heart of man, but it certainly reaches and influences the very heart of God. 'It moves the hand that moves the world.' We are simply lost in wonder when we try to contemplate the possibilities of believing and prevailing prayer. One of the marvels of the world is the Atlantic cable, which links two continents into one, and makes it possible and easy to have friendly intercourse, though three thousand miles of ocean roll between. This is the triumph of genius, and scientific skill, and human enterprise. And yet what is all that, in comparison with the simple and sublimely beautiful attitude of a little child, kneeling at a mother's knee, and lisping an infant prayer to heaven? Who shall estimate the forces and agencies and influences thereby set aworking, or calculate the remote and far-reaching issues that are begotten of an act, apparently so feeble and insignificant? It need involve no trouble or confusion or disturbance. The answer to that prayer need not interfere with the laws of nature, or the Divine plan

of the eternal ages, for it may have been taken into account, and a place given to it from the very beginning. To have a power like this—so awful and mysterious, and yet so blessed and benignant—placed at our disposal, invests human life with tremendous responsibilities. To bend the knee in prayer, and to have influence and power with God in doing so, is the most exalted privilege, the very greatest prerogative, within the reach of creatures and sinners. It is a power we can wield with safety, only in the utmost fear and trembling. Lord help us, and teach us to pray!

We may not limit God's goodness and mercy. He regardeth the cry of the destitute. Prayer is one of nature's truest and most general and universal instincts. God listens to the groans of creation. He feeds the young ravens when they cry, and cares for sparrows in their fall. And if some poor sinner, in danger, and terror, or great need, cry to heaven for help in some desperate hour, we may be sure his cry will not be disregarded. But we are now concerned rather about prayer as the instinct of grace than of nature; or, if we care so to consider the subject, the gracious action of the Spirit upon the natural man as 'the Spirit of grace and supplication.' It is a first-fruit of the new-born soul. It is as natural for a child of God to pray, as it is for a child to cry. It was the testimony and token that Paul was a converted and regenerated man, when in Damascus. The Lord said to Ananias concerning him—'for, behold, he prayeth.' He had often prayed before, but never in the spirit in which he prayed now. It was a truly gracious, and Divinely inspired exercise of soul, and God was graciously listening, and answering his

prayer, by sending Ananias to his help. In physical life, the heart throbs and palpitates while sending the blood to the extremities, and the heart-beats are the true index of life and health and vigour; and in the very same way, when the soul lives and prospers and is in health, prayer will become the true expression and register of its vitality—for

> 'Prayer is the Christian's vital breath,
> The Christian's native air.'

I. THE SPHERE OF PRAYER. I have ventured to suggest that prayer may be the greatest thing in the world. It has certainly a most magnificent and awful sweep and sphere of influence. Listen. 'Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh; is there anything too hard for me?' The Divine strength and human weakness are brought alongside one another, and the one gives scope and opportunity for making use of the other. They fit one another like lock and key. The chief difficulty is for poor weak mortals like us to take in the truth about it, and give God credit for honesty and sincerity of purpose. It seems to our little narrow souls as if too good news to be true. It might be for us a profitable kind of devotional education, could we calmly and reverently survey the vast reaches, and landmarks, and possibilities of good, which true prayer might gain for us, and make our own; and all the while our own spirits, awed and chastened and subdued by the holy exercise itself, might unconsciously, but really, be drawn upwards into the sympathies and harmonies of the Divine fellowship.

1. There is *Adoration*. If you approach God through the works of His hands, you are compelled

to do homage to His wisdom and power. He proclaims himself a fool who says, even in his heart—'There is no God.' The beautiful things of earth are eloquent for God; and who, that looks on sun and moon and stars, on the spring-time with its green earth and blooming flowers and singing birds, or on the seas and floods and everlasting hills—if he has one particle of devout imagination in his being—can fail to trace the footprints and finger-marks of the great Creator? And when over against the book of nature we scan with care and reverence the page of Revelation, we there discover, in awful majesty, the Power that makes for Righteousness, and as well the Divine heart of infinite love, and grace, and human tenderness. Amid the Cherubim and Seraphim, and the shining ranks of angel worshippers, there is a place and privilege for sinful men to bow the knee in lowly adoration. And for us who are lowest, and least, and most unworthy, the homage and adoration, while it is the most profound, may well be the most acceptable and welcome of all!

2. There is *Confession.* The consciousness of guilt gives a new meaning to worship, and a new character to prayer. The burden of sin banishes the sinner from the Divine Presence, until the gospel of forgiveness opens 'the way into the holiest by the blood.' Then the contrite sinner has a warrant for coming with boldness and confidence. But when he does realise the high privilege, the very first word he utters must be this—'Father, I have sinned.' The proud Pharisee had no consciousness—no conviction of sin. He took it upon him to confess the sin of the publican, whom he looked down upon with utter contempt and scorn. He was self-satisfied and self-righteous.

No word of conviction or contrition passed his lips, or had a lodging in his heart. All he had to say to God was the enumeration of his good deeds and self-righteous feelings. He had nothing to lament, or mourn over, or confess. He was concerned only to magnify his goodness, and had no consciousness of his badness. The poor publican was all the other way. All he could say was this—'God be merciful to me *the* sinner.' His was an evangelical, penitential prayer. No wonder 'he went down to his house justified rather than the other.' It would have been a contradiction of the gospel, and a mockery of true prayer, had it been otherwise.

3. There is *Thanksgiving*. Perhaps I should rather say—there ought to be. For there are not many among us who do not come sadly short here. The goodly grace of gratitude finds a cold climate and an ungenial soil in the human heart. Most men are so accustomed to their comforts and blessings, that they are in danger of overlooking them altogether, or of imagining they have a right to them. It is hard for us to accept the humbling truth that we are pensioners and beggars and paupers and criminals, and that every day of our lives we are dependent on the gracious bounty and charity of God. Too often the Divine generosity is lost and wasted upon churlish, selfish, thoughtless men. A cheerful, grateful disposition is something to thank God for, and it may need much to be cherished and educated. It will have a wonderful effect on our own spirits, if we try to note down, and count up our blessings, and come to look them fairly in the face, making mention of them in our prayers. 'Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless His

holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities: who healeth all thy diseases: who redeemeth thy life from destruction: who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies: who satisfieth thy mouth with good things; so that thy youth is renewed like the eagle's.' To say, or sing over these great words before God every day of our lives, and thoughtfully and reverently to cherish the spirit they inculcate, might work a wonderful and blessed change in the tone of our piety and our prayers, transforming and glorifying our whole lives. 'Oh that men would praise the LORD for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men!' 'Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift.'

4. There is *Petition*. This is the aspect of prayer which most profoundly impresses us. It appeals powerfully to the imagination, as well as to the heart. It is difficult to realise the Divine possibilities that belong to prayer. Perplexity and mystery and doubt, are wont to hamper and hinder our prayers. Yet there is no word in all Scripture more emphatic or absolute—'Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you. For every one that asketh receiveth, and he that seeketh findeth, and to him that knocketh it shall be opened.' Surely a warrant like this is all-embracing and all-sufficient, and the wonder is that anybody should want for anything! The chief danger, however, in our petitions, is this—the lack of true order and proportion. We may often imperil the answer to our prayers, by beginning at the wrong end, and putting the body before the soul, and self in front of Christ. 'Ye ask and receive not, because ye ask amiss,

that ye may consume it on your lusts.' Unless the heart and life are well kept, a man's prayers run great risk of being ill-balanced, and unreasonable, and impossible.

5. There is *Intercession.* This is the highest and holiest attitude any one can occupy in the exercise of prayer. It becomes high-priestly service. Abraham never occupies a more noble or dignified position than when he intercedes for the doomed cities of the plain. It is a wonderful story. How very beautiful are the modesty and meekness and reserve of the suppliant, while his holy skill and ingenuity and tenderness twine round the great heart of God, and prevail with Him! And the wonder is that Abraham gave up asking, before God gave up giving. Who knows! if he had added another clause to his intercessory prayer, and come down from ten to one, his request might have been granted, and Sodom might have been spared! It is Christlike service this—for the erring, and the sorrowing, and the suffering. No sublimer spectacle is presented to view in all this world, than that of Christ pleading tenderly for the men who drove home the nails that bound Him to the cross, and saying—'Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.' If we were found exercising ourselves unto this high and holy function, what blessings we might be instrumental in bringing to the church and the world, and how unspeakably it would ennoble our own spirits!

6. But there still remains another element in true devotion, which lies behind and beyond all we have enumerated. It is the human heart, in its great hunger and thirst, drawn to God by the aspirations and longings of the renewed nature. It is the home-

coming of the wandering soul to God. The errand is different from all those others. It is not the coming to ask, and receive, and go away. It is the coming simply to be near Him, enjoying the light of His reconciled countenance, and basking in the sunshine of His great presence. It is the coming, not for the sake of His gifts, but in order to find joy and delight in Himself. 'My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God?'

'GOD is the treasure of my soul,
The source of lasting joy:
A joy which want shall not impair,
Nor death itself destroy.'

II. THE SPIRIT OF PRAYER. The indwelling of the Spirit in the believer is a fact, and an experience. It is the condition, and the seal of sonship. All the gracious exercises of devotion are the gift and work of the Holy Ghost. It is a very mysterious and wonderful thing to find God the Spirit coming down into the depths of our being, laying His conquering hand upon us, so as to suppress the power of evil, and give scope for goodness. But the marvel is, that the goodness He works within us, is, or comes to be, our own. He is poured out in plentiful measure, and we are baptized with the Spirit of grace and supplication. And immediately we are in a gracious frame, and begin to pray. Yet the powers of our being are not superseded, or suspended, or ignored. All the energies of our nature become intensely active, and we give ourselves up to the business in hand. We never lose our identity, or proper personality. It is as when the writers of Scripture were inspired for the communication of heaven's message to men. The Spirit made use of holy men, and they spake and

wrote, as they were moved by the Holy Ghost. There was a Divine message, but the messenger was human, and conveyed and delivered it in thoughts and words that were his very own. He might not understand the full significance of all he had to say; but certainly he was never made use of, like a mere mechanical, unconscious machine, as the channel for Divine revelation. And it is even so, when the Spirit teaches and helps and inspires us in this mysterious but blessed privilege of prayer. He is said to make intercession —in our own spiritual consciousness. He helps our infirmities, and clears away our darkness and ignorance. He pleads and intercedes with groanings which cannot be uttered. Now in all this there is instruction and insight, of the most reassuring and satisfying nature. For it plainly intimates that in this matter of prayer—'praying in the Holy Ghost'—while we cannot do it without the Spirit, the Spirit cannot do it unless in the line of our conscious experience and effort.

This ought to bring home to us the solemn conviction of our absolute dependence on the Spirit, if we would truly and acceptably pray. This startling expression—'praying in the Holy Ghost'—is not found elsewhere in Scripture. It must include the ideas that we pray leaning on His strength, and guided by His wisdom. He must move our hearts, and suggest our desires, and direct our prayers. It looks almost like presumption to think or say it, and yet it must be the simple truth about this doctrine of the share the Holy Ghost has in our prayers—that God the Spirit has and holds communication and communion with us, through our very woes and wants, in helping our infirmities, and sustaining our

clinging weaknesses. Every time we find it in our hearts to pray a genuine prayer, God Himself is within us, contributing, in large measure, to the result, and impressing us with the profound and awful sense of His presence. What care, and fear, and scrupulous anxiety, should we all cherish, lest we wound or grieve this great Indwelling Friend and Helper! We may dishonour Him by a foolish forgetfulness of our absolute dependence on His heavenly help. Strange and sad it is to think how often we have gone through the forms and exercises and words of devotion, without the consciousness of God. A miserable feeling of desertion and desolation creeps over our shivering, shrinking spirits. We know it is all unreal, for God has gone away. The very words we utter seem as if they would freeze on our lips. All the joy and confidence of conscious fellowship is lost. We have been thrown out of correspondence, and the partnership in prayer is for the time dissolved.

A greatly needed lesson is to be learnt here. The very delicate and sensitive relationship of the Spirit to the believer needs careful watching and tenderest guardianship. A querulous spirit, a morbid feeling, an impenitent frame, an uncharitable word, an impatient thought, some failure of the temper or tongue —oh how easy to bring down on ourselves the clouds that darken the windows of the soul, and shut out from our hearts the pure white light of heaven! 'Oh that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me!' 'Oh that I knew where I might find Him! that I might come even to his seat! I would order my cause before Him, and fill my mouth with arguments.'

And yet it is just here that the truly devout, and tenderly sensitive soul, may write bitter things against itself, and be miserable without good reason. For it may sometimes happen that we are in the deepest and best exercise of prayer when our mouth is shut, and when we feel as if left utterly deserted, and without either words or desires. We may pray best, when we feel as if at our very worst, and not able to pray at all. There may be that mysterious but blessed intercession of the Spirit working deep within us, and the only token may be the groanings which cannot be uttered, and which only God Himself can interpret and fulfil. He will not fail to answer that groan and cry in the heart of His own child. It is His own, and comes as an assurance of sonship; and the answer may overtake us some day soon, with glad and grateful surprise, when we are least expecting it.

Before leaving this part of the subject, let me give you some striking words from 'Rabbi' Duncan, than whom no man is better entitled to speak—'Holy Spirit,' says one of the fathers, 'makes us *holy* and *spiritual*.' 'The testimony of God's Spirit, then,' adds Dr. Duncan, 'is only with the spirit of a regenerate man; it is the witness of the *regenerating* with the *regenerated* Spirit. It is the Father and the Son communicating with the souls of believers by the Holy Ghost, by means of the truth; and in this lies very mainly the secret of experimental religion. For example, prayer. The Spirit working sincerity, earnestness of desire, etc.—all that is contained in the "inwrought prayer" of a Christian man—this Christian man may not only be conscious by his own spirit (namely, his regenerate soul) that he doth so

pray; but, if the Father heareth and answereth prayer —that is, if there be as much reality in God's speaking to man, as there is in man's speaking to God— then as certainly as the believer has access by the Spirit through Christ unto the Father, in presenting his supplication, so certainly the Father hath access through the Son by the Spirit that dwells in this man to convey the answer. Is this strange—that the soul should speak to a hearing God, and hear a speaking God? This is indeed the very kernel of experimental religion!'

III. The Limitations of Prayer. If we would wish to take lessons in the school of prayer, and seek to have an intelligent appreciation of the laws and limits that govern and control its holy exercise, we must study and search the Scriptures. There we shall find our true warrant, and safe guide, and sure directory. If we can ascertain and comply with the sanctions and conditions laid down in the book of God, and are elevated into the real Spiritual frame that has just been alluded to, we may almost venture to fix and measure for our own guidance the religious and theological, and even the scientific value of prayer. It needs to be regarded with the utmost caution and reverence and reserve, for we are blind and cannot see afar off: yet when our Covenant-God condescends to give us His word, and to pledge Himself in a way impossible to be mistaken, the fault and loss are ours, if by any means we fail in our appreciation of this high and holy prerogative.

1. Prayer is limited by the Divine *promises*. Your prayer is understood to have over against it a promise. You thereby commit God. He cannot deny Him-

self. All His promises are yea and amen, in Christ Jesus. They are just like bank-notes. Any one in possession of a note can present it at the bank, and ask to have it exchanged for gold or current coin of the realm. It is taken for granted that there is gold enough behind all the paper-promises that are made; and yet it sometimes happens, when there is a panic and a run on the bank, that the supply fails, and it has to close its doors. Even so, when we come to the throne of grace, it behoves us to bring, and plead, in Christ's name, the 'exceeding great and precious promises.' We have only to present them at the bank of heaven to have them turned into golden experience—'grace to help in time of need.' Strange that we should be so sadly ignorant and indifferent as to the wealth of promise in the Bible! God's last will and testament is full of them. And they are all for us—God's legacy of grace. How eager and anxious men are to be remembered in the wills of the wealthy! If only we would take time to read the record, and find out for ourselves the wealth provided and promised in the everlasting covenant, and which we can make our own by prayer, it would speedily transform our poor, starved, shrivelled, narrow lives, and lift us into the heavenly atmosphere of peace and plenty. A poor woman once told me, with grateful tears gathering in her eyes, that she never found out how rich she was in scripture promises, till she had occasion to wear widow's weeds in token of her poverty and loss. Only when they suit our case and supply our need, do the Divine words of gracious promise and provision appeal to us, and grow grand and sweet and beautiful. We may read or listen to them a

thousand times, unnoticed and disregarded and despised, till the moment of need gives value to the word of mercy, making it great and precious. O that men would read and ponder and pray by turns! When will there be a run on the bank of heaven? 'Thus saith the Lord GOD, I will yet for this be inquired of by the house of Israel, to do it for them.'

2. Prayer is limited by the Divine *will*. We have an instinctive conviction that prayer is an appeal to the Divine will, and that it is possible for us to impress and move it. And we are warranted to believe that this may be so. We could not pray unless this were taken for granted. It is the very foundation on which we build our prayers and supplications. And yet the Divine Sovereignty is supreme. It is only safe and right to appeal to that will, when we own and acknowledge its absolute supremacy. In prayer it may possibly come to pass that my will impinges on God's. The spirit of my prayer may be—not *Thy* will but *mine* be done. In such a case it may be a greater boon to me, that God should refuse my prayer, and bend my will to His. If I cannot draw God near to me, I can at least draw myself near to Him, and this may turn out the greater blessing of the two.

> 'Our wills are ours we know not how,
> Our wills are ours to make them Thine.'

'O My Father, if this cup may not pass away from Me, except I drink it, Thy will be done.'

3. Prayer is limited by THE NAME OF JESUS. Christ's is the name that is above every name. It is as ointment poured forth. When we make mention of that name, we acknowledge our indebtedness to His

fame, and worth, and merit, and work. He is everything. We are nothing. We are as well pleased with the Son as is the Father Himself. We say—'Worthy is the Lamb.' And coming in His name, we put aside all we might cling to, or make account of, in ourselves. We are on safe ground here, for Christ Himself says—'And whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. If ye ask anything in My name, I will do it.'

4. Prayer is limited by *your faith.* In His earthly ministry, our blessed Lord made faith the test, and limit of all good. It is fitted to make us tremble when we seriously consider its bearings. For it places tremendous responsibility on our own shoulders. Faith, like a grain of mustard-seed, can remove mountains, and cast them into the sea. It can work miracles, and laugh at impossibilities. '*Nothing* shall be impossible unto you.' On the other hand, our Lord was limited and hampered and hindered at every turn, by the unbelief of men. He could do everything with faith—nothing without it. And even so with us—faith will be the measure, and limitation of our prayers. We may thus limit the Holy One of Israel, and prevent Him fulfilling all our petitions. 'According to your faith be it unto you.' 'Lord, increase our faith!'

5. Prayer is limited by *your good.* A recent writer tells of a godly old Scotch minister who had written on the fly-leaf of his Bible, which his friends only found out after his death—'Thank God for many unanswered prayers.' Concerning Israel the record is—'He gave them their desires, but sent leanness into their soul.' They grew tired of the manna—

'angels' food.' They wanted flesh, and He sent them quails. But there was a curse and not a blessing in the answer to their prayers—the flesh brought with it no good—it choked them. The mother of Nero prayed the gods that she might live to see her son sit on the throne of the Cæsars. Her wish was gratified. And, strange to say, when he became emperor, he—true to his character of cruel monster—murdered his own mother. How little we know what is for our real good, and how often we wish and long and fret, and even pray sometimes, for things that are evil and not good; and which in very mercy and kindness are denied us! Let us fall into the hand of the Lord, and not into the hand of man! It were better and safer by far to trust God, rather than ourselves.

'In nothing be anxious; but in everything, by prayer, and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus.'

XX

THE APOSTOLIC BENEDICTION

'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all.'—2 Cor. xiii. 14.

There are no words in all the range of Holy Scripture with which we are more familiar. They form what has come to be generally known as the Apostolic Benediction. In this character they are imprinted on our memories, and are written deep and indelible in all our hearts. They have for each one of us the most hallowed associations. They have come down through the ages, and have been spoken over the generations of men—from early youth to old age—in all our religious gatherings, and at the conclusion of all our church services and devotional meetings. In them we have a kind of symbol of the Divine fellowship, in virtue of which we are knit to one another in the brotherhood of the gospel, and our souls are supposed to be bound up in the bundle of life with the Lord our God. They are brave, grand words. They ought to carry with them the greatest possible interest and significance for every one of us. And yet, just because they are so familiar, and so very frequently in use, there is a serious danger lest they become hackneyed and merely formal to us, and

we let their great and gracious meaning slip. This Benediction has been spoken over us, with the apostolic associations of the Sabbath, and the sanctuary, and the gospel, it may be hundreds or even thousands of times. And yet, it need not be thought, or felt by any, that we are wanting either in generosity or charity, if we raise the doubtful question, as to whether, in many cases, the holy wish, and prayer, and invocation, may not be, after all, still unfulfilled. Many very widely different views may be taken as to the value of the words. Some may attach unspeakable importance to the fact of their being pronounced over them by consecrated lips, supposed to be in the line of apostolic succession. Others may attach veneration and interest to them mostly as the culmination and embodiment of a good man's best wishes and prayers on their behalf. In any case it is of the very last importance, clearly to understand the meaning of these great words, and to realise their worth when they become true in personal Christian experience.

I. There is here—THE DOCTRINE OF THE BLESSED TRINITY.

'There is one only, the Living and True God.' And 'there are Three Persons in the Godhead, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost, and these three are one God, the same in substance, and equal in power and glory.' 'The Father is God, the Son is God, and the Holy Ghost is God; but the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are *one* God.' This doctrine of the Holy and Blessed Trinity forms one of the profoundest, and most stupendous, of all the mysteries of the Christian Faith. And yet, it is an

unspeakably important article of our Creed, and one of the things most surely believed among us. It is of necessity a part of Divinely revealed truth. In its very nature, it is beyond the power or capacity of human comprehension. 'When we seek to know this, it is too high for us, we cannot attain unto it.' And yet, though human reason could not, of itself, discover this sublime truth; and cannot grasp its deep, and apparently contradictory meaning, even when it has been graciously revealed; nevertheless since it has been clearly and unmistakably unfolded in the word of the truth of the gospel, and forms the foundation of the Divine dealings in grace, as concerning human redemption, it becomes us, in deepest reverence and truest humility, to accept this sure word of prophecy and Divine testimony. And, though we cannot by searching find out God, or the Almighty unto perfection, yet, if we put off our shoes from off our feet, like Moses, because the place whereon we stand is holy ground, we shall learn great and wonderful lessons here. If we approach this mystery with the humility that becometh sinful men, and the docility of little children, and the simplicity that is in Christ Jesus, we may gather salutary impressions, at once of the Divine greatness and glory, and of our own poor littleness and ignorance. And if we are compelled to acknowledge ourselves baffled and defeated and flung back in utter impotence, as we attempt the solution of this insoluble problem, and try to think—three in one, and one in three; we can at least, in that view of it, say more impressively and more significantly than ever, 'Lord, what is man that Thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that Thou visitest him?' Nevertheless, we shall humbly thread

our way into the great Divine Heart, and discover that 'the secret of the Lord is with them that fear Him, and He will show unto them His covenant.'

The older Book of Revelation is burdened rather with the Unity, than the Trinity, of Godhead. Yet even there we have dim premonitions and unfoldings of the doctrine. For even at the dawn of old Creation there is to be found Divine counsel, and concert, and fellowship, in heaven. 'And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.' 'Then I was by Him, as one brought up with Him, and I was daily His delight, rejoicing always before Him; rejoicing in the habitable part of His earth; and my delights were with the sons of men.'

It is only in the later and clearer light of gospel times, however, that we have distinct and definite revelation of this great doctrine of the Trinity. 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' 'And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us—and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father —full of grace and truth.' The Word came forth to reveal and commend the Father; and at the same time He asserted and vindicated His own claim to true Divinity and Eternal Sonship. He, moreover, broke to His sorrowing disciples the coming of the Holy Ghost, whom the Father was to send in His name, and to supply His place. And the great Apostolic commission with which He sent forth His first followers was this—'Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.' And here, as in many other passages of New Testament teaching, the simple, sublime doctrine is

announced and taught, and the truth of it largely taken for granted. In both Gospels and Epistles it is the great theological factor, and is assumed as the very foundation for all true evangelical and evangelistic teaching; while it runs like a golden thread through the whole, binding the doctrines of grace and glory into unity, and completeness, and holy harmony.

We have only partial and broken glimpses, in holy Scripture, of the mutual relation of the Three Persons of the Trinity to one another. It is interesting and instructive for us, on whom the ends of the world have come, to note that the troubles and controversies and divisions of the early Christian church were mostly confined to two great subjects—the doctrine of the Trinity, and of the Person of Christ. It was only at the famous Council of Nice, in the year 325, under the lead of the great Athanasius, that this doctrine was finally formulated. Then the Eternal Sonship, and of one and the same substance with the Father, was vindicated and settled for good. The question of the procession of the Spirit from the Son, as well as the Father, caused the breach between the eastern and the western church, which continues unto this day.

The settlement of truth into systematic form, may involve a protracted and severe struggle. All our great theological findings have been won on the battlefield of controversy. It is good for the church's true life and work that dogma has grown definite, and religious truth has crystallised itself into creeds and confessions. Even in regard to this profoundest of mysteries, controversy has vindicated itself, and commended its function, inasmuch as it has settled

the perplexing question, and brought the mind and heart of the church into rest regarding it. And we are now the heritors of all the ages. Few men would dare nowadays to challenge, or disturb, or try to alter, the finding of the Church Fathers, or meddle in any way with the statement of the now venerable creed about the Holy Trinity. And this may afford us some little consolation, even if we think we must have fallen on evil times—times of shaking and overturning and controversy and severe and high criticism—when some of the things we have been accustomed to think were surest and safest, are being ruthlessly assailed, and called in question. The very creed and confession held by our revered and beloved fathers, with an almost exaggerated sacredness, as if actually inspired and Divine, is in some real danger of being tattered and torn to pieces, and mangled out of shape, by unhallowed and desecrating hands. Yet we may not lose heart, or begin to despair, or think too ill of our times, or our troubles. 'Truth like a torch, the more 'tis shook, it shines.' The now formulated truth about the Trinity was the child of storm. It was cradled and nursed in harsh and bitter controversy. By the rude blows of keen and critical discussion and debate, it has been hammered into fixed and enduring form. We may be compelled, by stress of circumstances, to call on men to turn their thought and attention anew to these great fundamental questions, and to revise the groundwork of their beliefs, and verify their evidences. Times of shaking may overturn and sweep away much, to which we had too fondly clung; but we can count on this as the issue—'that things which cannot be shaken may remain,' and be all the stronger and the safer for the shock.

Yet after all there comes over every man, sooner or later, a strange new experience, which alters his estimate of the formal and logical and critical findings of men, and the value of words and clauses, in creed, or doctrinal statement, of any kind, to give fit expression to the feelings and experiences and longings of the renewed soul. They may serve to give fixity and form to truth in mere theological abstraction. 'But when we come to *feel*, what we think we *know*,' in the impressive words of Principal Rainy, 'then the human form of doctrine takes a lower place, because the Divine Three are felt to be nearer in the Scriptures than they were before. It takes a lower place, it ceases to be so absolutely identified with the truth, as it lives and moves in the Scriptures, but it becomes clearly more real. With more feeling of feebleness and ignorance, with more faltering lips, and yet with an enhanced sense of the reality of that mystery of which our words come short, we confess Jesus Christ, our Saviour, our Elder Brother, to be God of God, light of light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, of the substance of the Father.'[1]

II. The Gospel Relations of the Persons in the Trinity to Believers.

These are 'Grace,' 'Love,' and 'Fellowship.'

1. 'The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.' The relation of the Son stands foremost, and is nearest to us. Through Him we reach, and understand, and know the great Father. For, He says, 'I am the Way, and the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh to the Father but by Me.' 'For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though He was rich, yet

[1] *Cunningham Lectures*, p. 172.

for your sakes He became poor, that ye through His poverty might be rich.' This knowledge is experimental. It cannot be gained at second-hand; and otherwise it is an utter mystery. But when we come to know Him, and the grace He owns and bestows, then we discover how very rich He was, and how very poor He became on our account. He was rich—oh, how rich! 'Being in the form of God, He did not count it a prize to be on an equality with God,' but emptied and humbled Himself. He became a man, a servant, a sufferer—'becoming obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the cross.' 'Though He were a Son, yet learned He obedience by the things which He suffered.' He thus impoverished Himself, that in the same measure He might enrich us. We were sunk in the depths of poverty, and debt, and disgrace. He comes to take the beggar from the dunghill, that He may set him among princes, and enrich him with all the treasures of His grace and glory. I cannot tell you what these may include—for 'eye hath not seen nor ear heard, nor hath it entered into the heart of man.' But I know this—that the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and all it includes—all it bestows and promises and pledges in time, and for eternity—all that is needed and provided, for the completion of redemption-work in the sinner's heart and life—*all that* is within reach of every sinner here; and the genuine apostolic wish and prayer and yearning desire is, that it may be with us all—as our possession, and our portion. 'For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will He withhold from them that walk uprightly. O LORD of hosts, blessed is the man that trusteth in Thee!'

2. 'The love of God'—the Father. We must not imagine for a moment that the love of the Father is due to the grace of the Son. It were to begin at the wrong end altogether, and invert entirely the Divine order of things, if we should suppose, that the Father loves us, because the Son has shed His heart's blood for us. It was quite the other way. It was the love that led the way to the death. John, in the Apocalyptic vision, sings his doxology—'Unto Him that loveth us, and loosed us from our sins by His blood.' And Paul confirms this testimony when he says—'He loved me and gave Himself for me.' We are here carried far away back to the contemplation of the eternal purpose of love and grace in the great Divine heart.

But there was a terrible obstacle in the path of that love finding its natural expression. Sin barred the way. The great moral sanctions of the Divine character and law had been violated and outraged. The majesty of the Divine government needed a new and worthy vindication. Sin must have its deserved punishment. Thus is explained and commended the Redeemer's errand to our fallen and guilty race. Like Curtius in old Roman story, He came and flung Himself into the awful breach. He magnified His own law and made it honourable. He was made of a woman, made under the law; and He fulfilled its uttermost demand—He met its very latest claim. Moreover, on His holy human soul fell the awful stroke of vengeance due to sin. The wages of sin were paid in death to Him, though He were the sinless One. It is the glorious gospel of substitution. Only when, taught by the Spirit, we discover the awful facts of sin, do we understand the real necessity,

and inestimable value of the Saviour, as representing us in law, and death, and judgment. And all the wonderful aspects of gracious condescension, and self-renunciation, in the Son, are only the expression and manifestation—in spite of everything that hindered its outflow and overflow—of the everlasting love of the everlasting God. It is 'the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God.'

And, indeed, this love of God is one of earth's greatest wonders. Some one has said, with truth, that we know more about God's love, than we know about anything else concerning Him. Has He not given grander and costlier display of His love, than of anything beside? His power and might, His wisdom and skill, have never been taxed and strained as His love has been. It has done its very utmost. Even His love cannot possibly do more for its objects. The greatest love is to be measured and reckoned by the greatest gift it can afford to bestow. 'God *so* loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son.' Who shall ever be able to calculate the infinitude of meaning in that wonderful little word—SO! It will need a whole eternity with Christ in glory, to explain and illustrate its breadth, and length, and depth, and height—the love of God in Christ Jesus. 'Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God!' It is a love that is never tired or weary—giving, blessing, saving—calling us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ unto Himself. And the ransomed of the Lord need have no hesitation, or misgivings, about taking all the good this love makes over to them, for there is no stint, or grudge, in God's heart of love. 'He will rest in His

love; He will rejoice over thee with singing.' 'He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not also with Him freely give us all things?'

3. 'And the fellowship of the Holy Ghost.' This implies communion, partnership, joint-fellowship. The Spirit comes into the sinner's heart to be the medium of communication for the grace of the Son and the love of the Father. It is in one Spirit we have access, through the Son, to the great Father. This Holy Ghost fellowship is a thing very hard to be understood. It means nothing less than the Divine indwelling. The third Person in the ever-Blessed Trinity is here represented, as condescending to become the fellow, and sharer, and partner, of our renewed lives, in order to make them both holy and spiritual, like Himself. We can imagine some famous old baronial pile, whose owner has fallen on evil times. He has neglected his estate, and his pecuniary affairs have become embarrassed. His castle is beginning to give painful indication of shameful neglect and incipient decay. It is crumbling into ruins. Owls and bats begin to claim it as their home, and it is haunted with imaginary ghosts and spectres. The owner himself has lost heart, and is fast losing character, and credit, and good name. Black ruin stares him in the face. He is a miserable, broken-down bankrupt, both in purse and person, as well as moral character. But a faithful friend comes to his rescue, and takes him under his guardianship and tender care. All his debts are paid. The ruined castle is restored and renovated, and they dwell there in common fellowship; and character and credit and good name, are reclaimed and vindicated anew. It

is only the story of grace in an earthly, human dress. The man in difficulty and disgrace there, is the lost sinner here. The benefactor who came to his rescue and restoration is the Holy Ghost, whose Divine fellowship is unspeakably wonderful and blessed. He comes into the man's castle and dwells there, for He comes into the sinner's heart and life, in holy partnership, and begins the work of soul-renewal and consecration, making it grow into an holy temple in the Lord—'an habitation of God in the Spirit.'

This Holy Ghost deserves very kindly consideration and goodwill on the part of all believers. He is a true benefactor and friend. He comes to be the very guardian-angel of every child of God. His sacred function is to quicken, and enlighten, and comfort, and guide, and keep, Christ's own. The holy fire of His Divine kindling, may be quenched. His blessed friendship may be wounded and grieved, and sadly wronged and interrupted. Oh that we might all understand better, and prize more, this high personal fellowship of the Spirit, and welcome Him as partner and sharer and helper in our prayers and endeavours after holiness and heavenly-mindedness!

And this fellowship is the common heritage of all believers. The saints are spiritual freemasons. We recognise and welcome our common brotherhood. There is the one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father, one Redeemer, who is our own Elder Brother, and one Holy Ghost dwelling in every member of the holy Catholic church, and binding them all into one, by the holiest ties and bonds and sympathetic interests. It is sad to find so many differences, and apparent divisions, among the professing children of God. The seamless garment seems

sadly torn and rent in pieces. Yet deeper down and nearer the heart of things, the divided church is one, in the fellowship of the Holy Ghost.

Thus are the persons of the Blessed Trinity leagued together in our interest, and each presents an aspect of the Divine goodwill suited to our great necessities, and all combine to bring the sinner back to God, and to goodness, and so, to the restoration of the Divine image in his soul. It is all of grace, and to God be all the glory!

III. The Worth, and Width, of this Benediction—'Be with you all.'

1. *Its Worth.* What is the real value of a prayer, or invocation, or benediction, like this? It certainly becomes us to speak with all due reverence and reserve, on a subject beset with so many difficulties, and about which there are so great differences of opinion, and so many fanciful imaginings. There is a reasonable and general impression among men, that a good man's blessing is worth a great deal, and may carry with it incalculably rich results. Some men prize at a very high estimate the blessing of the Pope of Rome, and are willing to prostrate themselves humbly at his feet and kiss his toe, in order to receive it at his hands. We cannot afford to sneer at, or depreciate, the blessings men get or give away. Very likely we are all of us enjoying the benefit of the good wishes, and earnest prayers, and generous benedictions, of saintly souls greatly better than ourselves, who may have fondly blessed us and wished us well long since.

But this I hold firmly, and state frankly, notwithstanding, that neither from the Apostles themselves,

nor from those who claim to be in the apostolic succession, can there come, any mystic or magic power, to bless a single human soul, as by a kind of mechanical necessity. We can assume—even if we claim to be in the great evangelical succession—no sacerdotal function, no priestly prerogative. All that even an apostle like Paul could take it upon him to say was—this is my best wish, my most earnest desire and affectionate prayer, on your behalf. Even an apostle had not Divine grace and love and fellowship to give away. No poor mortal on earth has these blessings in his hands, or at his disposal. We utterly disown the arrogant assumption that there is a storehouse of grace in the Church, or the sacraments, or the ordinances, or the ministry. This great bestowment is exclusively in Christ's blessed keeping, in whom it was the good pleasure of the Father that all fulness should dwell, and we of His fulness all receive, and grace for grace.

And, indeed, can any one wish, or ask, for more, or better, than this? It is the very greatest thing that we can get, or God can give. Or can we find fault with the gracious arrangement, by which we have only to ask that we may receive, for ourselves, or for those we long to help and save and bless? The thing to be most lamented is—that we so often ask and seek and knock, so very listlessly and languidly, and with so little desire and expectation. The wonder is that we get so much: but oh, what boundless possibilities yet remain!

2. *Its Width*—'with you all.' It is a broad and blessed prayer. It comes to any. It reaches all. It knows no limitation or barrier. It needs no title or merit or worth, on the part of those it would benefit

and bless. That glorious, shining sun in the heavens, flings its splendour lavishly and freely away on every side. It is as welcome to a beggar, as to a king. A miserable wretch may shiver in rags, and his fellows may grudge him the very ground he stands on, or the grave he shall soon lie down in; but he has only to lift his head and look upward, that he may have lighting on him the glory of God's shining sun, as if it were all his own, and none had any right to share with him its benignity and blessedness. Even so, a sinner—any sinner in all this weary world—with nothing but his sin and misery and awful need—may come and welcome to the grace and love and fellowship, so sweetly and generously prayed for here.

Only, men may have all these blessings brought very nigh, and they may deliberately put them all away. They may be brought to you this very day, and may fall, as it were, into your lap, and you may rise up and go away, leaving them all behind you, as you have so often done before. We can bring them very near, and make offer of them to you, in heaven's great name. But we cannot force them on you, or compel you to take them, against your will. You may refuse to let the benediction of heaven enter your soul, when all the time you are weary of heart, and empty for want of it. One day the saintly John Flavel preached from the text, 'If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maran-atha.' He dismissed his congregation without the benediction, after holding up his hands to give it. 'How can I bless those,' he said, 'whom God may have cursed?' A youth was present, who was deeply impressed by the incident. He afterwards went to America; and when quite an old man, the memorable

scene of his youthful days came back to him, with such power and solemnity, as to lead to his conversion. Once again, the gospel offer, and the benediction bound up in the very heart of it, come very nigh to you. There may be angels hovering round, waiting and wondering and weeping, over your indifference and unbelief. Take, oh, take, the Saviour away with you to-day, and thus, indeed, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship of the Holy Ghost, shall be with you all! Amen.

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